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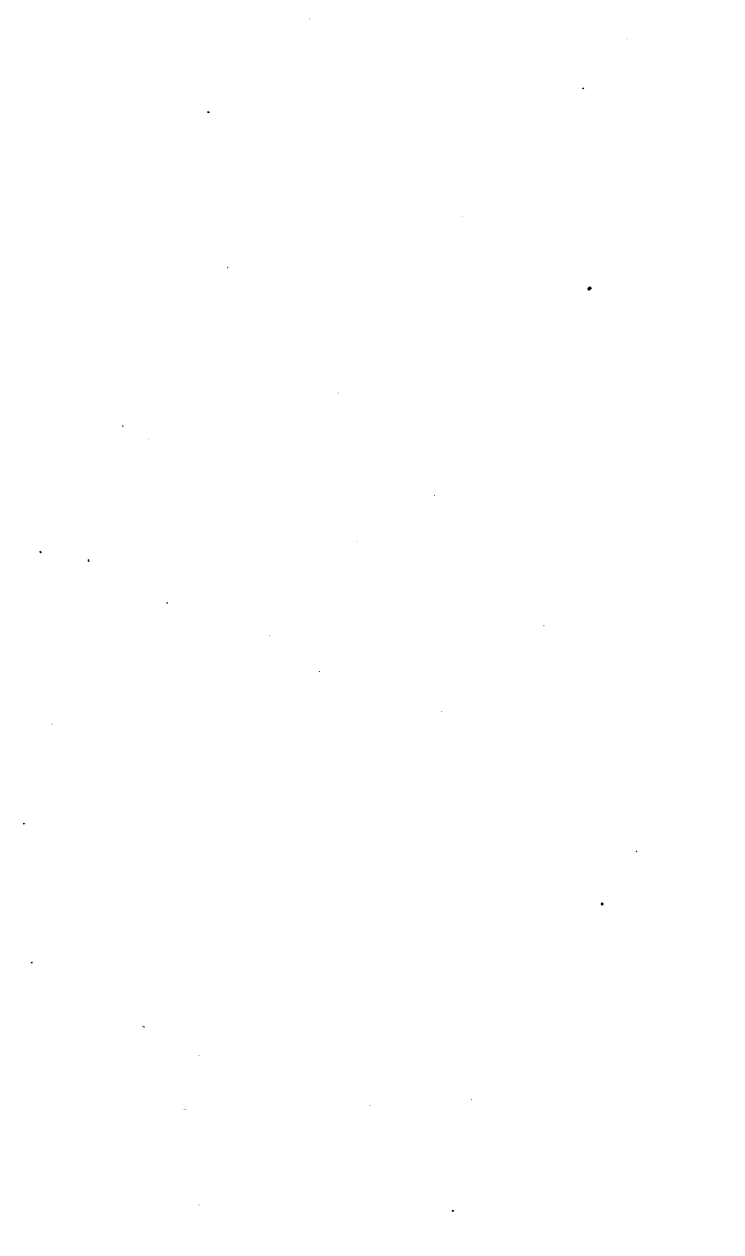
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“En Avant !” The Caravan in Mongolia.



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BY

Mildred Cable and Francesca French

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*Authors of*

*"Through Jade Gate and Central Asia," and*

*"The Fulfilment of a Dream."*

FREDERICK A. STOKES COMPANY

NEW YORK

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## FOREWORD

THREE British Government officials were listening to a fourth who told them some of the incidents recorded in this book.

Their response to the story was: "What takes these three women to such God-forsaken places? It can't be to make money; if it were they make a poor job of it. The fact that they do the journey so often shows that it is not for record-breaking, and the romance of adventure must have vanished long ago. I would like to ask them why they do it."

This book is our answer to that question.

EVANGELINE FRENCH.

MILDRED CABLE.

FRANCESCA FRENCH.

The Willow Cottage,  
Wessex.

## AUTHORS' NOTE

IN this personal story no reference is made to the work of other missionaries. Between the City of Prodigals and the City of Seagulls, the Trio only met with two missionaries, both members of the China Inland Mission, stationed at Urumtsi, capital of Chinese Turkestan.

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PART I

EVANGELINE

“ I never have seen Maid Quiet.  
Nodding her russet hood,  
For the winds that awakened the stars  
Are blowing through my blood.  
I never have seen Maid Quiet,  
Nodding alone and apart,  
For the words that called up the lightning  
Are calling through my heart.”

## EVANGELINE

**L**IFE might have followed an even course for the French family were it not for the turmoil perpetually kept seething by their robustious daughter, Evangeline. From an obstreperous infancy she emerged into a tempestuous childhood, and rebellious defiance was the breath of her nostrils.

Times and seasons were even fixed by reference to the escapades and accidents which befell the luckless child. It used to be "The winter when Eva fell into the fire," or "The summer when she tumbled into the pond," or "The autumn when she broke her head open on the garden wall." Perhaps it came from being born under the ray of action. Be that as it may, she certainly met with more accidents and mishaps than is the legitimate share of any human being.

The first outsiders to handle this unusual child were the gentle Catholic teachers of the clerical school in the French provincial town where her family alighted in one of their many migrations. On the first day of her introduction to that school, under some pretext, she regained her temporary freedom, and when her teacher went in search of

her, the little six-year-old was walking on the top of the high wall of the school enclosure. Wringing her hands in distress, Mademoiselle Eugénie ran back to summon help, and soon there was a row of distressed, black-robed women beseeching little Eva to come down and put an end to their anxiety. One of them held up half a bar of chocolate in glittering silver paper, another clasped her hands in entreaty, while the child from her really perilous position bargained that if she came down, chocolates and rewards should be her portion, but neither punishments nor rebukes should be mentioned. When the promise was given she quickly slid down and claimed her prize. Having established a reputation for audacity she set out to live up to it, and she stood alone in the school for acts of daring, defiance and insubordination. The schemes of punishment, which had proved amply sufficient for all other little girls of St. Omer, merely had the effect of a teasing gnat-bite on the dauntless Eva.

The teachers were under promise to bring no pressure to bear on the religious beliefs of the few Protestant pupils who attended, and this promise was honourably kept, but the month of May brought an inevitable flutter of religious excitement into the school atmosphere. There were retreats, religious instructions, first Communions, and a daily proces-

sion to the Chapel of the Virgin, whose white altar flowers were renewed each morning. The sight of a big pageant in which she had no part bred revolt in Eva's mind, and the only rôle which seemed to offer sufficient scope for her energies was that of the persecuted Protestant. It had not escaped her sharp ears that she was there on a special footing, and that her religious beliefs must be respected. Other Protestant children might like to have a share in arranging flowers, making paper roses for the wreaths or trimming the baskets which held rose-petals to be scattered in the procession, but this was Eva's opportunity to show herself a staunch and unrelenting Protestant. No paper roses would she make, no knots of ribbon would she tie, no rose-petals would she strip for their Catholic functions.

On one occasion a well-meaning but misguided sister thought to help the child to a change of heart by taking her hand and leading her to the Virgin's feet, where she purposed to recite a prayer for her little charge. Eva stiffened herself before the image and resolutely refused to kneel, or to be prayed for. Here was a grand opportunity for noble rebellion, and she went home triumphantly, reporting to her parents that the school authorities had broken their contract, and were seeking to turn her from the faith of her fathers. The applause she hoped for

was not forthcoming, and it was disconcerting to find the incident viewed quite coolly and to be merely told to go back, be good and give no more trouble.

In holiday-time and outside school hours her spirit of independence had full scope. St. Omer was a wonderfully fortified town with a system of moats, glacis and battlements calculated to make it impregnable. Among these old fortifications Eva French and her younger sister were allowed to play at will. Long summer afternoons were spent in exploring the earthworks, and there was not a tree, battlement or crumbling tower that was not climbed and investigated.

The migratory instincts of the family were making towards a move, and this time the children's education was the main consideration in choosing a home. With this in view the family moved to Geneva. The daily routine of life was now completely changed. Hard study was required to hold a place in the big, efficient public schools which were setting the standard of the educational world, and childish games had to go. With a stroke of the wand Eva French was transformed from the school terror into the model, hard-working pupil. Seven o'clock each morning found her at her desk with never a bad mark for late arrivals. She worked,

studied, made notes and threw herself into school work with the same zest as had characterised her exploits at St. Omer. Every moment was filled by making the most of all the educational advantages which Geneva provided, and the house became a kind of switching station, to which the various members returned for the purpose of taking in fuel to enable them to divert energy on to some other line. The hard-worked piano was in constant requisition for somebody's practice, and the passion for evening lectures made it impossible to live a normal family life.

Acquaintances multiplied, and gradually all kinds of interesting people came to use the house for purposes of discussion, conversation and debate. The intellectual ascendancy of the mother was the attraction to all sorts and conditions of people. Holidays were used for the most vigorous excursions, and on hot summer afternoons, when most people rest for a few hours, Eva dragged her young sister out for long walks at top speed over baking, glaring roads, determined that no place within reach should remain unvisited.

While, outwardly, Eva seemed to be a reformed character, her family knew that the same insubordinate spirit reigned within. At home she was as hard to control as an unbroken colt, though her

school reports affirmed her to be a zealous, studious, model pupil. During the summer weeks, which were spent among the mountains, Eva's rashness was a perpetual anxiety to her parents, for there was a driving force within her which compelled her to reach every summit, to conquer every physical difficulty, and never to admit herself defeated. The climax of her most irresponsible escapades was when, left alone in a fifth-storey flat with her young sister, she determined to climb out of the window, walk along an unparapeted edge and reach another window. She did it, but found that for once she had undertaken a more terrific feat than she had anticipated. When she saw the street so far below her and the people moving there like ants, and knew that there was nothing but the stability of her own nerve to save her from being dashed to pieces, she realised for the first time in her life that danger was a real thing, and that an accident might happen even to her. She never did this wild thing again, but her escapades were so varied that her family decided that, like the proverbial cat, she must have nine lives to play with.

The midnight hour which brought in the new year when she would pass her sixteenth birthday, was made memorable by another of her wild adventures. A strong north-east wind had blown for



days, lashing the waves of the lake over the breakwater which enclosed the port of Geneva. Gradually the narrow stone pier had become encased with ice, until it presented a perfectly smooth, concave surface on which it was practically impossible to keep a footing. The town was *en fête*, and the girls had been to see the fair and enjoy the merrymaking. As they neared the breakwater, on the way home, Eva left the party and dashed on to the icy way, disappearing in the dark. No answer came to the shouts calling her back, and it was impossible to follow. Her family had long since decided that no lives must be risked to save hers – if she would perish, she must perish. There was an hour of horrible anxiety, at the end of which time she reappeared, triumphant and grinning, and under her arm she carried sword-like icicles fully five feet long. It was useless to scold, but the frigidity of her reception was only equalled by the iciness of the load she bore.

There was no gaiety in pleasure-loving Geneva in which she did not take her full share. The first ball she attended was given by the British consul at the time of Queen Victoria's Jubilee, when the loyal colony celebrated the event with feasting and dancing. Eva's programme was quickly scribbled over with the names of such youths as were

prepared to dance without respite, and who never wanted to waste time talking sentiment in moonlit gardens. A dance was to her a delightful opportunity for physical exercise, combined with healthy enjoyment of the good things which supper provided, and never till sunrise could her weary chaperone tear her away, yet eight o'clock found her marching off to her lectures, a serious student once more.

This fierce thirst for pleasure, excitement and adventure only expressed one side of her nature. On the other her spirit was roving in the realms of uttermost dissatisfaction. Among the literary acquaintances of the household were many who belonged to the Realist school, which indulged gloominess and pessimism to its extreme point, and Eva was readily influenced by the morbid tendencies of this group. Geneva was also the city of refuge to Russian political offenders, and from this centre the Nihilist Press issued its propagandist literature. At that very time plans were laid which have since resulted in the upheaval from which Bolshevism was born. It was not an atmosphere in which superficial or frivolous views of life could thrive, and subjects were discussed in her presence which set Eva French thinking furiously.

The Genevan theological world held its own on

the intellectual and moral plane. The ministers of the town were a band of men whose influence was felt in the civic and educational world, but who seemed segregated from the despairing souls of these outer circles. On Sunday morning by nine o'clock Eva was always seated, along with a large congregation, in the plain building where the black-robed minister delivered eloquent and thoughtful discourses on matters theological and moral, and at ten o'clock she left that church to go direct to another; in fact, theological discourses supplied intellectual interest on Sundays, just as other lectures met the mental needs of the weekday.

The sound doctrine did have the effect of producing on the congregations a realisation of sin, of alienation from God, and of an account which would have to be settled before peace of mind could ensue but the particular appeal which brings wanderers home was lacking.

Once she made a definite effort to get help. At some small social function she was left alone, in a room, with the English chaplain. Turning to him, without any preliminary, she said :

“ I am miserable and dissatisfied. Can you tell me how to get satisfaction ? ”

He stared, obviously taken aback by the abruptness of the question.

"Well," he said, "you always attend Church services. They ought to help you."

Instantly she knew that this man could not produce a solution to the problem of her disquietude, and she said no more.

In due time Eva French left the Ecole Secondaire and became a student at the University. Here her intercourse with Nihilist fellow-students deepened her conviction that there was something so essentially wrong with the world that nothing but revolution could set it right. She would have sacrificed life, so that she might take her share in the rectification of all things, but her sense of utter incapacity to deal, even with her own disordered and tempestuous nature, bred despair and drove her to greater recklessness. She would have given much to be able to deny the existence of God, as her Nihilist friends did, or to throw moral restraints to the winds, but she could not. The problems of life and the tragedies of her own mysterious personality were too much for her, and she became a prey to such gloom as is known only to the young who, lacking experience of life, are unduly frightened by its threats. She was highly impressionable, and the Russian authors whose works she now devoured, caught her imagination and absorbed her interest in the

profound and vital matters with which they dealt so mightily.

Among all these turbulent influences she made one contact of a different order. It was a friendship with the wife of Bishop Shereshevsky, Prelate of the American Episcopal Church in China. The bishop himself was a very sick man, partly paralysed, who had to be lifted by his servant in and out of the chair in which he took his exercise. In spite of his poor health he was working hard at the translation of the Scriptures into Chinese, translating direct from the Hebrew, a task for which he was well fitted owing to Jewish parentage and his scholarly knowledge of Chinese. His wife had, before her marriage, been a teacher in the Mary Richardson School at Shanghai. Eva's deep interest in all Mrs. Shereshevsky told her concerning the Chinese girls to whom she was so warmly attached, led her to talk to Eva about China more than she did to anyone else, and the result was a living impression of Chinese girlhood which Eva never wholly lost.

The great religious sensation, however, was the coming to Geneva of the Salvation Army. In an atmosphere of riot, persecution, imprisonment, enthusiasm and hallelujahs they burst on the horizon, and at once set about to break the law of the land

by holding open-air meetings. This was forbidden by the authorities, and with good reason, for the atmosphere of Geneva was too highly charged with dangerous elements to permit of open-air demonstrations. Italian Communists, Russian Nihilists, French Atheists, Roman Catholics and Salvation Army hot-gospellers were all alike permitted freedom of utterance within the walls of a hired building, but on the matter of processions, demonstrations and open-air propaganda, the authorities were adamant. There was that about the methods of the charming young Maréchale and her band of enthusiastic, happy, simple, English youths and maidens, several of whom had no command of the French language and could only clap their hands and say "*Je suis sauvé*," which took the town by storm. The more chivalrous rallied round them and loved them, but they provoked the rowdy element to anything but good works. The meetings which they held generally broke up in pandemonium, with the police protecting charming Salvationists from rough hooligans; but when repeated warnings from the authorities were disregarded, they got to business and imposed imprisonment. Curiosity drew everyone to the Salvation Army meetings, and night after night Evangeline enjoyed the thrills, the songs, the fun

of grotesque testimonies in hopeless French, and even the riots with which the meeting generally broke up.

Personal friendships were slightly scorned in the too strong mental atmosphere of Evangeline's home, where anything approaching to sentimentality was anathema, and even the most normal girl friendships never matured. Domesticity shared the same fate, and the standard of comfort was low. Household matters were relegated to the tender mercies of Emilie, a German-Swiss peasant girl, who was left to make the best she could out of the elements provided for her. No one held up the urgent business of life to bother about meals or niceties, but for purposes of classes, lectures and time-tables the punctuality of the house was military in its discipline.

In spite of the multiple interests of continental life, the inevitable hour came when there was desire for a move and talk of a possible flit. The family felt it was time, if ever, to give England a chance, but the parents had lived abroad for so many years that they thought of England as a strange land, and the girls had never lived there at all, so were quite sure it must be a wonderful place, and thought of the move with excitement. The Geneva flat was given up, the furniture was quickly bought

by some new arrivals, and the whole family set off for England. The main difficulty was to know where to settle, for there was no single town in the British Isles which offered any particular attraction. Finally, for various family reasons, it was decided to make the first halt at a South Coast town. The fervid Nihilist, the incipient Communist, the embryonic Bolshevik, known to her world as Evangeline French, at this time entered her first protest against English provincialism which seemed to her conventional, snobbish, vapid and, worst of all, to measure even the great things of the world by the standards of its own little footrule. The instruction of the local music-master was so tame after the stimulating atmosphere of the Conservatoire, and the local School of Art showed up so poorly by the side of the well-equipped drawing-schools of Geneva, that Eva discarded the whole thing. Church services seemed unreal, and the sermon supplied but little food for thought, so that she soon gave up attending any place of worship.

There is no doubt that Eva cut a strange figure in the rigid Victorian set. It was not quite "the thing" to have been educated "on the Continent" and to be completely bi-lingual. For a young lady to hold strong opinions, to be revolutionary in outlook and unusual in small ways, was sufficient to



bring her under suspicion. Misery and depression closed in upon her like a dense fog, introspection and morbidity became the natural habit of her mind. She read, but increasingly cared only for that which was tragic, analytical or melancholy. The things which occupied her mind could never be ventilated in provincial society, and the conversation of the tea-party bored her to tears. Under the strain of nervous disorder her health went to pieces, and she was increasingly unable to control her nerves and her temper.

The first difficult winter was lived through with a desolating sense of a vista of such seasons ahead. In revolt against the world order, deeply conscious of the chaotic condition of human society, yet unable to find a solution or even amelioration for the lot of suffering humanity, in which her own present and future life was involved, the whole misery of mankind seemed to be laid upon her consciousness. The burdens imposed on woman, the horrors of the sweating system, the intolerable conditions of those living in extreme poverty, the sufferings of men and women in Siberia, banished for no other reason than that they demanded freedom of speech and the right to live – all these things suddenly combined to crush her under an intolerable weight of suffering, in the midst of which she realised she was helpless to bring

relief, and by the aimless drift of her life merely added her small quota to the sum total of human tragedy.

Eva was not highly articulate, and hers could never be the relief of formulating her deepest feelings in mighty phrases, but one evening, tramping up and down the room, she made an effort to put into words the tempestuous thoughts of her mind. Bursting out she cried: "I'm done with all this humbug. If I could, I would take the whole misery of the world on myself, and throw myself into the sea with it." To her amazement, her sister, who had never in her life framed a religious sentiment, answered: "You need not do that, Eva, it was done long ago by Christ on the Cross." The effect was electric, and Eva could only feebly answer: "That isn't the way I meant it," but the explosion was over.

A fortnight later something happened. An incident, trivial in its outer aspect, but tremendous in its import, led Eva, one afternoon, into an out-of-the-way church in a poor quarter of the town. An evangelistic mission was being held and the pulpit was occupied by an elderly man who, after the singing of a gospel hymn, began with utter simplicity to speak on an incident in the life of Christ. As she sat in that pew, the preacher, the

choir and the congregation suddenly ceased to exist for her, and she was alone with Christ. As the vision broke upon her she fell at His feet and begged forgiveness for all the sin and rebellion of the past. She saw in His death on the Cross a full, perfect and sufficient oblation for her sins. Then and there she accepted salvation and staked her all on the fact that Christ had died for her. In His Presence everything fell into right proportion, and her own wilful, undisciplined nature met its Master. Now she knew that Christ was asking her to give Him her heart, and to yield up her life for His use. In this moment of illumination she saw that above chaos there was a plan, and in that plan a place for her. In her innermost being she yielded, accepted Christ as Saviour, acknowledged Him as Lord, and came back to a consciousness of her surroundings to hear the choir singing the closing hymn: "Safe in the arms of Jesus."

She left the church, came straight home, and the same day told her family that she had found Christ. Personal religion never came under discussion in this household, and the information was received with a disconcerting silence, but within a few days it was quite clear that something tremendous had happened. Evangeline, who hitherto had never recognised authority, was mastered, and she was

now a willing slave to the One Who told her that He needed her. There was an end to wild talk, unbridled passion and ungovernable temper. Her restlessness, like the sea when the typhoon is over, gradually subsided, until there was a calm such as she had never yet experienced.

When, at the close of the mission, the hard-working clergyman made an appeal for Sunday school teachers and district visitors she was the first to respond, for she knew by the unmistakable witness within her, that she was saved to serve. The confusion of her mental life was adjusted by the new orientation and there was no problem for her as to how much of the old she might legitimately retain, for in Christ she was a new creation with a new objective, new tastes and a revolutionised interest in life.

The church was in a slum parish, and the vicar immediately appointed Eva as visitor to one of the worst streets of the neighbourhood. Here she met down-and-outs in all their undisguised misery. It was a seafaring town, and in her district were many houses of young girls whose profession was that of temptress to Jack ashore. In the cellars and attics wretched families lived on the earnings of some seafarer's deserted wife. At each corner there was a public-house crowded with men, women and

children, and among these sin-seared people she found herself curiously at home. Here, on the physical plane, was the same turbulence which had so lately dominated her own mental life, and she had something quite definite to say to them. In the artificial, respectable, smug circles she was for ever fiercely protesting against some accepted canon of convention, and she resented the waste of time which was spent in skimming the surface and denying the depths, but among the wretched and drunken, the unhappy and despairing, she found that something of infinite value had been entrusted to her to convey to them.

There were now no idle hours in her day. All through the summer she worked hard at a Children's Beach Mission, and all the year round did more than her share at Sunday school, district visiting and cottage meetings, but she quickly realised that this was but a preliminary step to her life-work. The missionary who spoke on the afternoon when she was converted, had paid a second visit to the locality. This time he was staying with friends, and Eva was asked to meet him at their house. During tea he spoke of a journey to India and of various things he had seen there. Before the end of that meal Eva received a definite inward call to be a missionary, and from that time her mind never

wavered for one moment from the conviction that God had appointed her to be an evangelist among the heathen.

When she began to ponder details she found a certainty in her mind that China was to be the country, and as it were in confirmation of this leading, there was brought to her notice before long the name of a society called The China Inland Mission. The very name attracted her because it settled the initial difficulties which might so easily occur in dealing with other societies, such as finding yourself appointed to Central Africa when you knew clearly that your call was to China. In due course a letter went to the secretary of the China Inland Mission which contained an offer of service from Evangeline French.

This remarkable organisation was a body of people under the leadership of Dr. Hudson Taylor, the first man who set out to evangelise the inland provinces of China. The society, which accepted all those who they were convinced had received the call of God, guaranteed no support, solicited no funds, and would not go into debt. The answer to her letter came in the form of an invitation to spend a few days in the Women Candidates' Home which was under the superintendence of Miss Henrietta Soltau.

On the day appointed she walked along the row of uniform houses called Pyrland Road until she found No. 41. She knocked at the door, which was opened by a smiling girl who took her name, reported her arrival, and then conducted her to a room divided by cotton curtains into four sections. In the corner allotted to her was a small bed, one chair and a painted wood wash-hand stand. A little later she was called down to take on her first job, which was the writing of labels to be pasted on a great array of jam-pots. She was painfully afraid of doing anything wrong, and she wrote them all out in her best copper-plate hand, but view them as she might they would not look right, and she was made the more nervous by the intimate knowledge that spelling was her weak point. When the middle-aged woman who was superintending the jam making looked at the labels, a puzzled expression flitted across her face, as though they would not come right for her either. In the middle of the night Eva realised, with horror, that she had written them all in French, "Abricot," instead of the English "Apricot." She felt this was a bad beginning, and when a few days later her bed, being unexpectedly inspected, the housekeeper exclaimed: "My dear, what would the Chinese say to a bed made like that?" she felt she had but slender hopes

of passing the councils. In later years as she rolled up her wadded quilt and stuffed it, along with a blanket, into her sleeping-bag, she thought of that early reproof and contrasted methods of training with the end thereof. As days went by she became painfully conscious that she knew all the things she ought not to have known and knew none of the things which she ought to have known, and there was no health in her.

In due course she saw the councils, and when, in answer to the question: "How long have you been converted?" she said: "One year," a look went round which she interpreted to be unfavourable, and at the close of the interview she went back to her cubicle filled with despair.

The atmosphere of the house was pervaded by the charm of its gracious superintendent, who radiated goodness. The basis of unquestioning faith on which the home was conducted was in itself a spiritual education to all who came. When they reached China these girls would find themselves literally dependent upon God for material supplies, and in this house they learned the first lessons of that dependence. The days spent there were a great help to Eva in the things of the spirit, and when she left she was much encouraged at being told to come again in a few weeks' time for a longer visit.



"Anyhow," she thought, "they have not turned me down straight off, and perhaps I shall show up better next time." In comparison with most of the other candidates she felt painfully undomesticated, and she came home determined to remedy this defect, but in the surroundings of her own home she quickly backslid into her usual habit of regarding domestic work as a bothersome duty to be dispatched with the greatest possible speed. At Pyrland Road one of the staff, looking at her well-cut dress, had pointedly asked her if she could make her own clothes. In this she detected some hidden trap which might block her way to China and must therefore be circumvented. As soon as she got home she bought a length of serge and sat down to make herself a dress. With infinite toil, and by dint of many unpickings, a garment was eventually produced which bore unmistakable evidence of having been home-made, and was sufficiently dowdy, even for a missionary, so on her second visit to Pyrland Road she wore it.

She now passed the initial stage of being definitely accepted for training, and it was arranged by the China Inland Mission that she go to Deaconess House, Liverpool, for two years. Deaconess House had a reputation for being the most strenuous of the training-schools, and this was quite in keeping with

Eva French's ideas. She was prepared to throw herself heart and soul into the work and bow to every form of discipline. Indeed, she was inclined to view all the demands of this period as planks of the bridge over which she must walk in order to reach China, and with her eye on the goal none of these things moved her. A preliminary letter came, telling her what outfit she would require at Deaconess House, informing her that she would immediately wear uniform and requesting her to arrive in the plainest of clothes, preferably wearing a bonnet. She overhauled her wardrobe and selected the home-made black serge dress as being most devoid of style, but the matter of the bonnet was more puzzling. She was accustomed to do her district visiting in a plain sailor hat, but since, for some mysterious reason, any hat seemed to be unsuitable to wear, even for the journey to Deaconess House, some way had to be found out of the difficulty. Her mother's charming bonnets of lace, twisted with an egret or a flower, were the only ones available, so she tried them all on, but wisely discarded them and decided to take the risk of scandalising Deaconess House by appearing in a hat.

When the day came she went off happily to Liverpool, but the very next day received the news of her father's sudden death. He had

succumbed to a heart attack twenty-four hours after she left home. Under the sobering influence of this shock, Eva French entered upon two years of concentrated work and discipline, determined to stumble at nothing that was considered necessary to equip her for China. For the first year all went well. Each morning was spent in Bible study, and the excellent grounding she had acquired from the *pasteurs* in Geneva stood her in such good stead that to her own amazement her name appeared second on the list of the first scripture general knowledge examination.

There was no end to the activities of Deaconess House, and the deaconesses were lent out to hard-worked vicars in the slum parishes of Liverpool, where they toiled unremittingly among the Sunday schools, cottage meetings, girls' clubs, bands of hope, and open-air meetings. Each one could be relied upon to do the work of a whole-time curate, without the inconvenience of requiring a stipend. Eva's Sunday evenings were spent at the Strangers' Rest, where she was very happy among people of all nationalities. She was made leader of a club for French-speaking girls, and using that language with more fluency than English, she was useful as French teacher in the Y.W.C.A. Educational Department. Gordon Hall, its headquarters, was also

used for a multitude of evangelistic activities, and Eva was one of those appointed to lay the carpets, move the chairs, sweep, clean and dust. Life was one hectic struggle with multitudinous duties, but no one cleared them off more expeditiously than Eva French.

The second year things took a bad turn, for it was decreed that she should have six months' training at a large Liverpool hospital. She was still to live in Deaconess House, but walk every day to her work, be an extern probationer, and return home at night. She hated nursing, hospital wards, and all the paraphernalia of the sick-room. In this uncongenial atmosphere she wilted, and every day it became harder to drag herself to those distasteful duties. At the end of a month she knew she was heading for a breakdown, but carried on doggedly until the day when she collapsed in the ward, and was carried to a room where the doctor saw her. He sent her back to Deaconess House with a strong message that she was to be put to bed, well fed, and do no more of their charring. Thus ended her hospital career. Delighted as she was to be free of the place, her heart sank when she realised that failure in this one branch of her training might close the door of China to her. As soon as she recovered a little she was sent back to her

beloved slum district. Living in these mean streets were people whom she had led to Christ, and who were now making a brave attempt to live a Christian life in devastating surroundings. She knew that her gift was personal work, and the visiting gave her opportunity for the conversations through which she brought to so many the knowledge of her Saviour.

All through the years of preparation Eva's family felt slightly estranged from the subdued young woman who came and went with such grave demeanour, and who was so unlike the tornado of a girl who used to keep the house in a perpetual commotion. They wondered if she wholly realised how contrary to her own nature was this exterior of uniform piety that she wore, and they deplored an ornament which suited her so badly. It seemed impossible that that which she had been, could ever become that which she now appeared.

It was as though she had slipped a sheath over her personality which so covered it as to make contact impossible with those very people to whom the witness of her conversion would have been most telling. There was no doubt that in the slums she found liberty of expression, and again, later on, in China, when she went out among the villages. Then the sheath was left at home, to be slipped on

again when she came back to the compound. Not until ten years later was that old mask finally discarded and, under the influence of understanding comradeship, the real Eva re-emerged.

In the training-home she wore it always, and those who handled her never knew the woman that she really was. She always feared that if she showed her natural self she would be misunderstood, and the door of China might be shut to her, so she learnt to walk circumspectly and held her strong personality in check, so as to appear that which she was asked to be. Trainers disciplined her, but on her, discipline had the effect of compression, and not development.

At the close of the summer term she returned to London, and then the fight began. Miss Soltau maintained that the hospital test was an unfair trial of strength, but the warden of Deaconess House said that Eva's sphere was clearly in England, where her knowledge of languages specially fitted her for Y.W.C.A. work. Doctors shook their heads, because she had never fully recovered strength since the unfortunate breakdown, and there was a bad mark against her for an attack of rheumatic fever, years ago, in Geneva. The councils hesitated, and referred her to yet other doctors, who all agreed it was taking a very

big risk to send her to the East. At this juncture, however, Dr. Hudson Taylor himself stepped in. He personally assumed the responsibility of accepting and sending her to North China, where the climate would be less exacting than in the southern provinces. Through it all Evangeline kept a steady head and an unmoved conviction that her call to China was a Divine commission, not finally dependent on the opinion of either councils or doctors.

Her family were now living in Richmond, Surrey, and all through July and August of 1893 she went to and from Pyrland Road packing her outfit and making arrangements to sail on the 1st September by the P. & O. steamship *Britannia*. The warden of Deaconess House still refused to leave Dr. Hudson Taylor's decision unchallenged, and made it her business to influence certain members of council so that, almost up to the day of sailing, someone was urging that Eva should be held back on further probation. Dr. Hudson Taylor, however, having made the decision was not to be deterred, and when the time came, she sailed from Tilbury Docks.

The voyage was a desperately uncomfortable one, the boat was even then old-fashioned, the cabins cramped and stuffy, the food unpalatable, and the whole party was tormented with sea-sickness. They associated little with fellow-travellers, it being

considered desirable that missionaries should from the commencement adopt a policy of exclusion, and the sight of those sober young women holding prayer meetings and taking lessons in the Chinese language was certainly calculated to keep outsiders at bay. Board ship life left an impression of such misery and deadly monotony as made her dread the prospect of a second voyage. In the China Sea the ship encountered a typhoon, and dull monotony was exchanged for acute misery. With joy she left the boat at Shanghai, and proceeded up the Grand Canal to Yangchow, where the China Inland Mission's Women's Language School is situated.

Six months later, seeing that her health was still not satisfactory, she was appointed to Kaoyu, a town only a day's journey along the Grand Canal. It was a mistaken move, for Kaoyu was hot, damp, unhealthy, infested with mosquitoes, and during her first summer in China she had both malaria and dysentery. Fortunately Dr. Hudson Taylor reappeared on the scene, sent for Eva French and dispatched her at once to the dry, northern province of Shansi. Here illness disappeared and she became a normal, healthy woman.

This was 1894, the year of the Sino-Japanese war, so the journey inland could not be taken by the ordinary route. There were four young women to



travel north and they started off on the great adventure of a three months' journey across China, by boat and cart. The mission authorities had selected the most delightful escort for the party, a man who was a brilliant speaker of Chinese, and so thoroughly understood the people that he could win his way among them anywhere. He set out to make the journey as profitable and happy as possible, and Evangeline revelled in the experiences which they encountered, was encouraged by the progress she made in the language, and thoroughly enjoyed fellowship with her earnest, devoted, thorough-going fellow-travellers, as well as the racy intervals during which their escort displayed his gifts of humour, and taught them to appreciate China and the Chinese. There is a priceless letter written during the journey, in which he describes each one of the interesting group of girls. Of Evangeline he wrote as follows :

“Miss Eva French is a sort of angel who has come to tabernacle for a short time in the flesh, but who is largely sustained by ambrosial food. She did us all good spiritually and acted the part of lady's maid to the party.”

Soon after her arrival in Shansi, Evangeline began to find an outlet for the exercise of her special gifts.

She laid hold of an old Chinese woman, to whom she paid a small wage, nominally to wait upon her, but in reality to be the means of introducing her to the homes of innumerable friends and relations. Riding on donkeys the two women scoured the villages and, when necessary, spent the night in the house of any who would give them shelter. The mission station soon became a place in which to keep her boxes, but her missionary work was right out among the people.

Sometimes in the long rides across the sun-baked plain, she would think back to the time, so few years before, when she was still turbulent and restless, and she marvelled at the grace which had stepped in, controlled her nature and unified her being. She now began to see in operation the marvellous order of a surrendered life. Only five years before, sitting in the varnished pew of a commonplace building, God had made her understand that He needed her life for the fulfilment of His purpose, and now she was entering on a further step of response to that vocation. Her preparation for China had been a mere interlude, a difficult period of constraint, when she was forced into a groove in which she could never have run easily. Its greatest value had been that for the first time she willingly recognised authority, and bowed her

untamed will to the demands of uncongenial conditions. By taking up this pilgrim-preacher's life she deliberately chose conditions of utter discomfort, sharing the lot of those whose standard of life was of the lowest. She often slept on verminous beds, lying by the side of opium-smoking women, who got up at midnight to take the dope. For long, sleepless hours she would lie and listen while those women talked to each other, and in this way she got to know her people. Her whole being was thrilled with the deep sense of satisfaction which only comes to him who is at peace with God, and is doing his job.

As the years went by great things happened. Some of those opium smokers were converted and their lives changed. Those who had been slaves to sin were liberated, and instead of lying on the mud *kang*,\* inhaling the deadly drug, their persons and houses were clean, and they were out and about telling others of their wonderful Saviour. Evangeline was no longer dependent upon a gossiping old woman to open homes to her. She now had more invitations than she could accept, and some women in distant villages had come to be fellow-workers, and were her frequent companions on evangelistic trips.

\**Kang*.—A brick or mud bed heated by a fire.

In the spring of 1900 she rode out to spend a few days in the house of such an one. Before she reached Mrs. Meng's door, the bright, earnest woman ran out to meet her, helped her to alight, took her by the hand, carried her bags, and brought her into the house. "It was hot on the road to-day; wash your hands and face while I boil the water and get you a cup of tea," she said. Then neighbours crowded in, and there was no more quiet until dark when the door was shut, and the two women, each rolled in a wadded coverlet, lay on the brick bed.

Then Eva spoke. "Sister," she said, "a strange thing happened to-day as I came into the village. A man looked up from his hoeing and, when he saw me, made a sign as if to cut his throat. What was the meaning of it?"

"Teacher," Mrs. Meng answered, "there are terrible rumours of coming trouble. In the province east of the hills there is a society called 'Righteous Fists,' and they who join it threaten to kill every Christian in the land."

"But what have they against the Christians?" Eva asked, though the reports from east of the mountains were not news to her.

"They are the Christians' enemies, Teacher; they are devil-possessed. No weapon can wound

them." Then in a low whisper: "Our village is full of them and the man you saw is one of them. No one speaks about it, but there is danger ahead."

During the next few days, missionary and convert read together the book of Revelation, and every word seemed pregnant with meaning and more living than ever before. As they parted Evangeline turned to Mrs. Meng, saying:

"Never forget that command: 'Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee the crown of life.'"

"Teacher," the woman answered, "I know."

From that house Eva went on to another farm, many miles distant, where nine brothers lived under one roof and worked the land together. The eldest son was a vigorous Christian and the leading spirit of the family. The temper of the people was changing rapidly, and they could talk of little else than the threatening storm. The news that the anti-foreign Governor of Shantung had been promoted to be Governor of Shansi showed plainly that official approval was behind this so-called Boxer movement. Evangeline saw that it was quite a new thought to these simple folk that Christians might really have to die for their faith, and she deliberately told them of a recent massacre in South China, when missionaries and their children had all died together.

“How about it? What will happen if the same trouble comes here, and you have to choose between death or denying your Saviour?” she asked.

There was a silence, and then the eldest brother spoke. “I could never deny Christ,” he said, then very soberly he added: “Even if I had to die for Him.”

As he said it a light came into the face of his little brother of fourteen, the seventh of the big family.

“Nor could I,” he cried out.

A few weeks later bands of Boxers, decked with ribbons and sword in hand, were drilling in all these villages. Then the order was given to kill, and this elder brother, his wife and children were slain together. The little seventh boy also sealed his testimony with his blood.

Many Christians fled into the hills, but no one gave the widow Meng warning to do so, because her family hated her Christianity. As she sat at the loom one morning, a band of murderers thundered at her courtyard door. She rose, and seeing who they were asked them in, saying:

“Gentlemen, I am ready for you, but just allow me time to change my dress.”

Then she went to her room, knelt for a moment, put on her best dress and coming back she quietly said:

"Now, sirs, I am ready."

In a moment her head was severed from her body, and she went the nearest way to the Celestial Gate. They had killed her body, and after that they had no more that they could do.

While these things were happening in the villages Eva French was hemmed in, caught in a mission compound in the centre of a large town, and she had with her several young missionaries who had been placed in her charge for the summer months. It was hopeless to try and get anybody to a place of safety, but no one had thought of this town as being particularly hostile. As they sat at lunch one day, they were startled by the angry growl of a Chinese mob outside their compound walls. At the same moment a young servant rushed in to give them warning that the whole town was in an uproar, and men were hammering at the front gate.

"We must go direct to the city magistrate," Eva said. "Who can lead us to the Yamen?"

"I know the way," said the boy.

"But dare you take us there?" she asked.

"Certainly I dare," he answered.

In a flash Eva had been guided to see that their only hope of escape was to make the local official responsible for their safety and for any catastrophe

which might overtake them within the area of his jurisdiction. To her companions she said :

“ We will all go to the Yamen. Whatever happens we must not be separated. However wild the crowd, let us walk quietly and not look frightened.”

A moment later the small party of women walked out by the back-door into a side street. Instantly the mob sighted them, and there was a wild surge of yelling fiends around.

“ Kill ! Kill the foreign devil ! Kill ! ”

“ Go ahead,” said Evangeline to the boy, and as quietly as though they were out for an afternoon stroll, the women walked into the midst of the mob which unaccountably parted and fell back before them. It was ten minutes' walk to the Yamen, but they reached it alive and were taken directly to the magistrate's presence. Now they understood why the mob had so suddenly risen, for they heard that on that very day a dispatch had been received direct from the Empress Dowager, which read : “ Kill every foreigner you have in the town.” The whole city knew of it, and if there was killing to be done, there were plenty of men ready to lend a hand.

The Yamen was packed with people watching the strange scene, and eager to report on any lack of obedience to the throne on the part of this man-



darin, who was a native of South China, and spoke the peculiar dialect of his own locality.

"I can do nothing to help you. I have orders from the Emperor to kill you," he shouted, as he paced angrily up and down the room.

"Are these orders issued by the Emperor?" asked Evangeline.

"No, by the Empress Dowager, the old Buddha," he said angrily; then seeing he had to act, he exclaimed: "What are you women doing here alone? Where are your men-folk? Well, seeing you are but women I'll pass you on to where you have some men," thus grasping at a possible solution for himself; for while he was loath to kill, he dared not disobey. Then passing quite close to Evangeline, in his pacings, he murmured: "Whatever you do don't go north."

That day her wits were sharpened by the Spirit of God, and the man's strange accent came to her clear and unmistakable in its meaning. A moment later he was standing in front of the crowd, telling her in a loud voice that he would arrange for carts to take her north to the capital city, where both he and she knew that the murderous Governor Yû Hsien held sway.

Then the comedy began. He for his own safety's sake urged her to certain death, under the guise of

protection; she countered him on the strength of the hint he had given her, and absolutely refused to go anywhere, except due south. Slowly, reluctantly, and with every appearance of anger at this obstinate woman's persistence, he finally yielded, saying: "Very well, have your own way, south you go."

That night the party remained in the Yamen, and very early next morning was sent off on the four days' journey south, to a town where another party was waiting for an escort to leave the province. The official had written out a passport which made each mandarin in turn responsible either to hand them over in safety to the next official, or kill them himself.

The party travelled under military guard, and the soldiers sitting on the front of the cart began to talk: "It was because of the pistols up your sleeves that no one dared to attack you in the streets yesterday; if it had not been for that you would have been done for." It then transpired that as the women walked out of the house it was evident to the mob that they were holding something up their wide sleeves, and the word went round: "Foreign pistols!" No one dared to be the first to attack, and so they reached the Yamen in safety. The absence of fear, the quietness of their movements, and their dignified calm in the midst of such danger,

all went to prove that they had some unseen means of protection. The fact was that each girl had seized her Bible, and was carrying it out of sight up her sleeve.

For his help to Evangeline French and party, this man was degraded by the Empress Dowager herself when she passed through that town some months later, fleeing from the retribution which her own mad deeds had brought upon her.

The season of intense heat had come upon them, but all day they were shut into a springless cart behind thick curtains. Each night they were smuggled into some Yamen quarters to hide them from the fury of the mobs. Through the hours of darkness they could hear the shouts: "Kill! Kill!" and the curses of the guards beating back the angry rabble. Before dawn the soldiers would call them to start and got them out of the city before the rioters were back again. Shaken by the excitement, the shock and the tension, they travelled on, sick and almost spent, with aching heads and still more aching hearts, until they reached the town, where they joined the other party of refugees. Here there was delay, and news reached them of one group after another having been murdered, some by public execution, others in their own houses, and some by the roadside.

The mandarin's favourite subterfuge was to supply a party with an official permit which ensured safety to the border where his jurisdiction ended. At that point his military escort would leave them, but the mandarin whose territory they were just entering was not officially informed of the foreigners' presence, and would therefore not assume responsibility for anything that might happen to them. Such an inadequate permit must be refused at all costs, and for fourteen days they argued the matter out with the city magistrate, who was only too anxious to see them off. The passport which Eva French had secured, handing the party on from Yamen to Yamen, was a help in forcing the hand of a more cowardly man. At last he had no option but to yield, and they started on the long, overland journey to Hankow, which they knew must occupy at least fifty days. They were only a few miles on their way when a party of Boxers attacked them; Evangeline was sitting on the front cart and she was the first to be dragged to the ground by her hair, while her captor flourished his sword over her. At that moment he sighted a box of silver, which a companion had slit open, and fearing lest others should arrive to share the booty, he flung her aside, seized the silver and disappeared. In that hour she realised the impotence of those who

kill the body to touch the calm of the spirit, for her heart was flooded, and her mind garrisoned, by the peace of God, so that she knew no fear. Later on, as she thought of her many friends who had been killed, this experience comforted her, for she knew now the measure of their suffering, and had proved the truth of the words : " He that believeth on Me shall never see death."

For fifty days of heat, misery, unutterable fatigue, hunger, thirst and rioting, they travelled across China, conveyed as prisoners from city to city. Sleeping in prisons, temples, or verminous holes, they carried along with them a man in delirium, a sick woman, and two small children, both of whom they buried by the way. At last they arrived in Hankow, accompanied to the very last by Chinese Christian men, who endured every peril and hardship of the road with them, and without whose help their escape would have been impossible.

Hankow had been evacuated of all women and children, except for the few who remained to nurse the refugees, who needed to be fed and cared for before they could proceed to Shanghai. For Evangeline it was Shanghai and then England. It was seven years since she reached China, and the sobered woman who emerged from that terrific experience was a very different person from the

impetuous girl of 1893. She had tested her vocation and proved it, she knew what she had to do, and what it cost to do it. The romantic thrills of new experiences were known for exactly what they were worth. Now the so easily sung hymns and the so glibly uttered phrases of missionary meetings had been tested in the crucible of utter realism, and though on the one hand, she did not so readily sing :

*The peaceful joys of home behind,  
Danger and death before,  
Right cheerfully they set their face  
To seek the foreign shore,*

yet experience had worked hope, and the old pessimist Eva French was gone for ever, while the new Evangeline could quite simply go anywhere, dare anything or face any hardship - WITH GOD.

PART TWO

MILDRED

“ . . . Why mine  
Such fearful gospelling? For the Lord knew  
What a frail soul he gave me, and a heart  
Lame and unlikely for the large events— ”



## MILDRED

**T**HE repercussions of 1900 bid fair to close the door of China to Mildred Cable. Until then all had seemed to go smoothly, but now, with devastating suddenness, the purpose towards which all her life had been set seemed to collapse, and threatened to bury her in the ruins.

When she was still a little, solemn-eyed, fair-haired child, a phrenologist came to her parents' house and threw his eyes over their children. As soon as he saw little Mildred he exclaimed sententially: "Here is one to whom faith will always be difficult." A sense of disgrace seized the child that this mysterious exposure of her inner being should have revealed her as one so far removed from grace. Not only was it said, but in the volume of a book it was written, and handed over to her parents, by the wise man who professed to look at her head, feel its shape, and know all that was in her heart.

She knew far more about faith and unbelief than her elders suspected and about sin, judgment and the terrors of hell too, because there reigned supreme in the nursery, a woman of such theological

acumen that matters of grace, salvation, heaven and hell, held no mysteries for her. With admonitions and warnings she tried to safeguard her young charges from ever walking that broad and easy way which leads to destruction. The thought that before morning she might awake in hell caused little Mildred many sleepless and tearful nights, but the prospect of heaven was not joyous, for there was God to be faced, and His vigilant, all-seeing eye would be a more terrible reality there than it was even here. How many times she had coloured and pricked out nurse's favourite text: "Thou God seest me," and now standing in the drawing-room, with the visitor's eyes upon her, she knew that her sin had surely found her out, as nurse's other text declared it would. This clever man with a mere glance at her face had said that she would always find faith difficult.

Fortunately there were some things that neither parents, nurses nor phrenologists need ever know about, things which belonged to that other world into which she stepped when lights were out and safe darkness closed in. Lying very quiet, lest nurse should think she was not asleep, her spirit roved, and her unconstrained imagination built up a whole world of interest and of unfettered action where there was free intercourse with an imaginary

set of children. This was real life and all the incidents of the day, with many matters of which she had heard casual mention, were woven into her dream world.

Yet sleep never took her unawares without the sub-conscious fear of that vigilant eye from which darkness could not hide her, and the dread of hell was so insistent, that her real prayer, which her heart uttered every night after her proper prayers were said, was : " Let me live till morning. Only let me not die in my sleep, and wake in hell."

One night something happened, and, in a vision, she was in the Temple at Jerusalem and saw the Lord Jesus Christ who was there playing with the children. They were having games with palm branches, and He turned, looked towards Mildred and called her to join in, which she did, utterly happy, utterly safe and utterly understood.

She woke up a different child, and this vision gave her something that has remained with her through life. Henceforth, though grown-ups, with nurses, might still distort the character of God and make her prick out frightening texts about His watchful eye, she knew she had seen the Lord Jesus Christ for herself and seeing Him was to love Him. Now she knew Him better than they did because she had seen Him and spoken with Him, but it took her

many years to come free of fear and to understand that God was revealed in the face of Jesus Christ, and that the vigilance of His eyes was so tender that not even a sparrow fell to the ground without Him.

Among the happiest memories are those of summer holidays spent in the Isle of Wight where the children bathed, played games on the sands, and attended delightful children's beach missions, conducted by jolly undergraduates, who arranged lantern processions, picnics, races and competitions. Occasionally, but only when nurse was absent, parents were induced to let the children sit on the sand-benches and watch the minstrel performance; this also was sheer bliss, and the glory of one memorable day when Sambo, meeting little Mildred on the sea-front, touched his hat and said: "Good morning, Missie," was such as has never been quite equalled in later life.

All too soon governesses began to take their troublesome part in the child world, and with school days a stern rule of life set in, interesting, but so overstrained by the burden of extra subjects that the heavy preparation required finally curtailed all childish liberty. Games formed no part of the school curriculum, and neither walks, sports nor amusements held a legitimate place in a school-girl's life. Even in summer holidays the children

now had a governess who, as they said, "spoilt every minute by her mere presence." Just because Mildred was by nature so studious, extra pressure was brought to bear on her.

She passed up the various grades of the school, taking her share of prizes as she went, but the pleasure-loving side of her nature was unrecognised, and even the excursions or picnics, in which she longed to join, were denied her on the plea that she must not waste her time. She was in danger of becoming a mere learning machine and might have done so were it not for an irrepressible love of enjoyment which, curbed in every form of expression, forced an outlet for itself in the most unlikely channels, making up by its intensity for the smallness of its opportunity. The restraint of an overdisciplined life released in her an abnormal capacity for enjoyment, so that both in anticipation and in retrospect such simple delights as the memory of a spray of honeysuckle thrown across a hedge, or the gathering of blackberries on an autumn day, tipped the balance of pleasure till it touched the index of pain. Imaginative books fascinated her, but when it was discovered how much the fairy tales entranced her, they disappeared from the nursery. She said nothing, but learnt to make up her own and, at the same time,

learnt the art of guarding against adult tutelage the secret of everything she most deeply valued.

She was still in her early teens when she was called upon to face life's greatest decision. It happened thus: A Children's Mission was to be held. It was an unprecedented thing in the town, and among the children excitement ran high. Extra work and lessons were willingly put in ahead so that for this one week there might be a little free time. The meetings began on Sunday, and after a delightful afternoon of singing choruses and listening to bright addresses, the children came home to scent with dismay an atmosphere of disapproval. They caught hints of "too much emotion," "unsuitable for the young," "might lead to anything," and several parents agreed not to allow their children to attend the mission. Only at the special request of her clergyman was Mildred allowed to go to the final meeting on the last Sunday afternoon. He fetched her and brought her home himself from a meeting which was a very impressive one, and on the way he seized the opportunity of urging her to personal decision. He was intensely in earnest, and so was she, and during that quiet walk she gave her heart to Christ and He bestowed on her the gift of age-abiding life.

The experience was too sacred to be talked of at

home, but it found full expression in a weekly Children's Service which grew out of the mission, and which became one of the chief delights of her life. In order to supply a need she taught herself the harmonium and played the hymns at the gatherings. She also visited absent members and shepherded various small children to the meetings.

This coming to Christ was a confirmation of Mildred's earlier impulse when she had so joyfully run to Him that day in the Temple, in answer to His beckoning hand. Outwardly there was not much change, but inwardly her moral nature was awakened to a completely new sense of right and wrong, and the spiritual life which came into being that day, was pressed into a deep, hidden channel.

The fairy tales which had been pilfered from the nursery shelves by her elders, were replaced by missionary books and some stirring tales of Christian martyrdom. Mildred's faith fastened on to these stories of burning enthusiasms, and she mentally dramatised all the thrilling incidents of those heroic lives, in imagination walking boldly to the stake with her beloved heroine Cecilia, the Christian martyr.

The tone of the town where she lived was narrow and provincial and in religious matters denominationalism counted for more than vital Christianity.

There was, however, one man whose faith was of a reality calculated to turn the whole petty structure upside-down. His life, time, talents and money were used solely as a means of extending the Kingdom of God. He would allow nothing to stand in the way of winning men and women to Christ, and cared nought for the artificial restrictions which, as a clergyman, were supposed to be binding on him. Whatever church, chapel or conventicle held a man of God, that man was his brother. He was one of a small group which some years previously, had met, prayed, believed, and by faith called into being that which was later known as the Keswick Movement. Under such a compelling manifestation of the spiritual dynamic, denominationalism was doomed, and the tremendous truth, "All one in Christ Jesus," was sounded through the town.

The reaction of the small-minded and unspiritual was so intolerant that the men who yielded themselves to the influence of God's Spirit had to withstand cold criticism from their own congregations, as well as the aloofness of unfriendly Churches and the sneers of scoffers. It was a sharp test and many failed under it, but there emerged a loyal band of men and women of all classes and sects who, being once set free, refused to be caught again in cliques,



coteries, or ecclesiastical exclusiveness. They trusted each other, worked harmoniously together, and among these people the girl, Mildred Cable, found herself, and made friendships which have been lifelong and living.

For several days of each year a tent was erected and a great convention held, to which all the leading Keswick speakers came and declared the counsels of God. Lives were revolutionised, deep-seated prejudices went up in smoke, and men and women were liberated. The memory still lives of certain great meetings such as the one when D. L. Moody compelled his audience to face the issues of life and death; and a missionary gathering in which Bishop Hill of Africa stood with a black Christian brother by his side and made an appeal which stirred men and women to such depths, that they never could be quite so smug again.

In the summer of 1893 something further happened. Mildred was away on a delightful holiday, but before it came to a close she heard from her clergyman that a certain missionary from China was to hold some special meetings in her native town in connection with the China Inland Mission. Something within her, an unaccountable impulse, moved her to cut short the holiday, even though she hated doing so, and get home in time to meet

this woman. She did it, deeply puzzled herself as to why she should take such a strange course. At the first meeting she was introduced to the missionary, a somewhat inconspicuous lady except for a rapturous smile, a contagious zeal and a way of talking about the Lord which conveyed the impression that He was her constant companion, and that every detail of life was submitted to His approval. She was dressed with super-plainness, and wore on her collar a woven inscription: "Jesus He shall save." At the close she walked home with Mildred, and in the course of talk turned to the young girl and said with amazing daring: "I think the Lord wants you in China."

"I think not," was the reply. "I have no thought of being a missionary, but if I had it would be to India that I should want to go."

"You must go where the Lord sends you, my dear. If you are Christ's you must be His entirely."

"Do all you China Inland Mission people wear a text round your neck?" Mildred abruptly asked.

"No," she said. "I do it because I always wear it in China and see no reason for dropping it here."

Mildred's unspoken comment was: "I suppose it's all right for China, but I don't like it here."

No more was said, but the conversation made a lasting impression, and Mildred was aware that she had received an indication to which she did well to take heed. She had never before heard of this China Inland Mission, for it was not one of the large denominational societies for which she had collected money, or at whose bazaars she had helped, but she now made it her business to find out all she could about it. She was rather intrigued by its unusual basis and peculiar methods, and impressed by the so great confidence of its members in the sufficiency of God, that they looked direct to Him for the supply of their needs, and solicited funds from no one.

A year later, when the Convention was held, Mildred knew that the next step for her was to publicly commit herself, and when the appeal for missionary volunteers was made, she stood. Her intense nature was one that could not tolerate a feeble purpose or a divided heart, and from that hour nothing was allowed to enter her life untouched by its central enthusiasm. Everything was made to converge on the one purpose of increasing her knowledge of Asia, and of equipping herself for every possible emergency of missionary life.

It would have been immeasurable gain to her whole future if at this time her parents had

listened to the advice of a medical friend who, impressed by the too great seriousness, sensitiveness and responsibility of the girl's nature, took on himself to urge them to give her one year of complete liberty, to run wild on a farm. In their view, however, it seemed folly to interrupt her schooling, so the advice was ignored and life pursued its strenuous course.

Mildred was still a schoolgirl when she paid her first visit to the Candidates' Department of the China Inland Mission. The occasion was that of a half-term holiday, and with an exhilarating sense of personal liberty, combined with vocational purpose, she took the train, travelled to London and made her way to the blank vastnesses of its northern area. Forty-one Pyrland Road, Mildmay, was, as usual, humming with life and buzzing with enthusiasm. She was only there a few days but she thoroughly enjoyed herself, and was thrilled because she found all the great things which she had read and heard concerning the China Inland Mission were true. The simplicity of the house agreed with her notion of the austerity to be expected in missionary life, and she loved Miss Soltau who was superintendent of the house. These holiday visits were repeated periodically until she left school.

It was her mother's wish that Mildred should

study at a continental Conservatoire, but many other things seemed more important than music for a missionary career. Before, however, finally abandoning her plan she determined to settle once for all the question of vocation, by allowing her daughter to spend six months in the China Inland Mission training-home. By the end of this time she confidently hoped that the project would peter out and that Mildred, having had her fling, would fit the more easily into normal, social life. The effect produced was contrary to anticipation, and Mildred was happier than she had ever been, in the cheerful, communal life of the missionary training-home. The provoking of one another to greater devotion, the constant meeting and speaking with returned missionaries, the Bible study which was full of fascinating suggestiveness, along with the aggressive evangelistic work, made everything seem worth while, and strengthened her purpose.

At the end of the time, her father took her abroad for a long summer holiday, and for the first time she tasted the delights of travel. By the time she had wandered through Belgium, Switzerland, Germany and France, she had experienced enough enjoyment to turn the edge of any mere girlish enthusiasm for hardship and martyrdom, but Mildred Cable had

not lost herself in the gaieties of the continental hotels. Behind all the delight, the sociabilities, the music, the paintings, the mountains and the lakes, was still the figure of the Christ commanding her allegiance and reminding her that these things were for her use and her enjoyment as she passed through, but that her hand was on the plough which she must drive in a straight furrow, with her eye fixed on the objective, which was neither ease, pleasure, fun, nor self-expression, but obedience to His every command.

When neither the six months of probation spent in a non-luxurious training-home, nor the tour abroad spent in luxurious hotels, had choked her off China, it was finally accepted by the family that Mildred was to be a missionary. She was quite young and there were still a few precious years to be spent in preparation before she need definitely offer herself to the China Inland Mission.

She left home and became a student under a pioneer woman scientist in London. The teacher was so one with her pupil in the things of the Spirit that she was prepared to do anything which might better equip her for the future. A great friendship grew up between them which has continued right through life, and has been one of the most formative influences on Mildred's character. Before long

Mildred went to live with her teacher and, under her direction, she worked harder than she had ever worked before. From Monday morning to Saturday midday she was never free from lectures, laboratory demonstrations and preparation.

Of set purpose Mildred Cable did not take a full medical course, realising that by so doing she would have tied herself irrevocably to the work of a hospital. She believed her call to be otherwise, and with her teacher's help, a course of study was drawn up which would supply her with as complete an all-round training as could be pressed into the years she had to spare.

At that time North London was being stirred by the ministry of a vigorous and eloquent preacher. His name was suddenly on everybody's lips, and on the occasion of a national festival Mildred went to hear him. When every other preacher was indulging in laudatory platitudes, this man chose as his text: "The Offence of the Cross," and electrified the congregation by his forceful contrast of the claims of Christ with the pomp of the world. This was talk after Mildred's own heart, and when she realised his genius for Bible exposition, and still more his unique capacity for inspiring his hearers with a zest for studying the Scriptures, she attached herself to this Church, and under his tuition the

study of the Divine library developed into an engrossing habit of life.

These were the early days of that great weekly Bible school which still shows London that the simple reading and exposition of scripture will draw and hold a crowd. The live ministry was not organised with a view to pampering an overfed congregation, and the inner circle was expected to be out on the King's business each Sunday evening, seeking the lost and leaving room in the crowded church for others to hear the Gospel message.

The most important of these outside activities was carried on at Variety Hall, a building used for music-hall entertainments each day of the week and hired by the Church, on Sunday, for evangelistic purposes. Mildred's first introduction to this meeting was due to the accident of a torrential downpour of rain, which compelled her to take shelter on the way to church. Here she was at the very door of Variety Hall with its bold poster inviting all to walk in and listen. It was a large building, filled with a miscellaneous North London audience, in happy mood. Hymns were projected from a lantern and the singing was hearty, familiar and lively. The atmosphere was distinctly mirthful, the seats were comfortable, the lighting was adequate, the music was good, the addresses were



brief, and there was a good deal of personal testimony. The workers were young, vigorous and contagiously enthusiastic. The patter of heavy rain on the roof made everyone more appreciative of the comfort inside.

By the time the meeting came to a close the mirth had given place to a solemn hush, and when the last speaker made an appeal for personal decision for Christ, there were many who rose and walked to the enquiry room, where they were led to the Saviour.

Before long Mildred Cable joined this evangelistic band and gave her Sunday evenings to the work at Variety Hall. These young people were inexperienced when they started, but they did not long remain so, and the minister exerted all his power in their training. His Bible teaching supplied them with as much work as they cared to put into it, and on Sunday afternoons he gathered them around for talk and conference. They were free to ask questions, argue difficulties and propound problems, in fact, to say anything, in any way, which had reference to the Kingdom of God, sure of a sympathetic hearing. The group worked together in complete loyal-hearted devotion and self-abnegation.

In this community the Church was doing its legitimate work; training its own missionaries, as

it witnessed to the careless multitudes of London; and from month to month Mildred found herself better able to handle the weapons of her warfare. Every branch of Christian activity was a delight, Bible study was becoming a passion, and every hour to be spared from her lectures was spent in a quiet library with her books around her.

Six days of the week were, however, given to laboratory and lecture-room where, from time to time, there was the delight of listening to men whose discoveries were revolutionising the thought of the scientific world. It was all stimulating, thrilling, exhilarating and alluring. In these circles also there were congenial spirits, and at the Student Volunteer Conferences she met with men and women whose zeal and devotion powerfully impressed her. Life was sheer delight, and service for Christ in every department was its greatest joy.

Then terrible things began to happen. Like a bolt from the blue came the Boxer outbreak in China, and the murder of scores of missionaries. The Press was wild with detailed reports of the horrors which had preceded death. It was known that many more Westerners must be making an attempt to escape from the Boxers' hands, and the sufferings through which they were passing were a nightmare to dwell upon. She heard that the dearly-loved

missionary who had been the messenger to call her to China was the very first to be massacred. Friends and acquaintances were almost unanimous in declaring that no right-minded parents could ever consider allowing a daughter to go amongst a people capable of such atrocities. Even the usually optimistic Mission Boards were appalled, and it was generally accepted that no reoccupation of stations could be considered for years.

Under the stress of the storm Mildred bowed her head and was silent, knowing that when God's time came opposition would be overcome and His will accomplished. At each crash she had had the solace of sharing it with one who seemed to understand, and whose avowed missionary purpose was like her own, temporarily thwarted; but in the midst of this welter of hopes and plans there was one more blow, and that a soul-shattering one. On a beautiful May morning, when the lilac was in bloom, there was put into her hand a letter in which that was written which made a goblin of the sun. Unless she take a devious course, and deny her vocation, she must pursue her pathway alone. In one hour the brightest things of life burnt themselves to ashes, and joy removed itself so far from her that it took years to court it back. It was the eve of an important examination which,

if she passed successfully, would confer a coveted honour, and for which she had been bracing herself with keen zest. It was useless to think of attempting it with a mind rocking under such a shock, and that examination was never taken.

From the supersensitive, over-controlled, too intense girl, had emerged a joyous and keenly alert young woman, who drank deep of every source of innocent pleasure. That day she died; and in her place there was one who drew the protective garment of complete reserve around her and shrank from contact with her fellow-creatures, thankful to be hedged in to a life of isolation, the more rigorous the better, among people of an alien race, where she would begin a new life and let the curtain fall upon the past.

Suddenly the political situation took a most unexpected turn and by the autumn of 1901 it was considered safe for a party of young women, all of whom had been accepted before the riots broke out, to proceed to China, it being understood that they would remain at the Language School, near the coast, until the interior of the country was quiet.

On September 25, 1901, Mildred Cable sailed from Liverpool on the S.S. *Majestic*, travelling *via* North America with her father, who parted with her in the United States. Not until she was leaving

the shores of England did he tell her that at her birth he had dedicated her to God for the foreign mission field. It was a tremendous sacrifice to give her up, especially in such circumstances, but both parents felt that there must be no drawing back from an offering which had been made and accepted.

. . . . .

Twelve months later two mule carts drew up at the front door of a North China mission station. The travellers who sat in them were coated with heavy dust, even their eyebrows and eyelashes were covered with it, and the lines of their faces were blurred. They wore Chinese dress, and they had every appearance of extreme weariness. A voice was heard calling out in Chinese: "The visitors have come, they are here at the door." A moment later Evangeline French came down the sloping path to greet them and held out her hand to clasp that of Mildred Cable. They had never met before, but they were both people to take rapid impressions, and Evangeline was saying to herself: "What possessed them to send such a frail child to our hard inland conditions? She will never even stand the journey." Then, after a second look: "She has plenty of grit, though, and if she can only hold out, she will make good."

Mildred Cable looked up at Eva French, whose portrait she had so often dusted in Miss Soltau's sitting-room, and thought: "There's something I like about you, you look trustable." Then, in a wave of recollection: "But I don't think I will ever trust anyone again." That evening Mildred Cable heard from Eva that they were to travel together to the province of Shansi.

After one day of rest, the mat-covered mule litter arrived to take them off on the two weeks' journey which was going to give them so many quiet hours for talk. As far as they knew, they were to travel together for two weeks and then part; but it was fore-ordained that this should be the first stage in a life companionship. At the end of this journey they separated for a time - Mildred went to give medical aid to a fellow-missionary, and Eva wandered off to survey the havoc wrought by the Boxer persecution in the Christian Church. There was salvage work enough to keep her hands full, and she went from village to village, strengthening the battered believers. At the sight of an old friend they poured out the whole story of their sufferings, telling of those who had been tortured, and of others who had been done to death, not accepting their deliverance that they might obtain a better resurrection. Some with whom she spoke were

branded on the forehead with the scar of a cross cut there by the Boxers, who always declared themselves able to see that hated sign on the face of a Christian. She talked long and solemnly with others who, in an hour of panic, had recanted or had merely accepted a legal paper which secured them temporary protection, which things, looked at in the cool hour after the battle, had an air of compromising infidelity about them. It was a sorrowful pilgrimage among a desolated people.

In one large town she saw the public ground where more than fifty missionaries were slaughtered at one time in a wild saturnalia of bloodlust, by the cruel Yû Hsien. Her guide was a Chinese Christian who, as protesting prophet to his own people, stood on this very spot every day and proclaimed Salvation through the shed blood of Christ. She travelled the road whose dust had been crimsoned by the life-blood of dear friends who, like herself, had been attacked by the wayside but whose deliverance had been through, and not from, death. There was a holy spot where the woman, her friend, who had also been used to summon Mildred Cable to China, stood on the steps of her own courtyard facing the furious mob for the brief moment before they hacked her to pieces and threw her body into the new Baptistery wherein yet no man

had been baptised. Weary, heart-sick and spent with overstrained emotion, Evangeline finally arrived in the city of Hwochow. This house also was shadowed with tragedy because the two English women who lived there formerly had been massacred, and the Chinese Christians had not recovered from the shock. It was with deep gratitude that both Evangeline and Mildred heard that they were to live and work together in this town. In the intense atmosphere of those first months friendship ripened, and each found her companion to be a woman with whom she could share the thoughts of the mind and the aspirations of the spirit. They were thrown into such intimate contact that they had to share one small room until workmen had repaired the rest of the house, but every day emphasised the congeniality of their temperaments, and proximity was no strain.

The task of reconstruction which lay ahead of them was greater than either realised. In addition to the building up of the Church there was a gigantic task of pioneer educational work to be carried out under enormous difficulties. One step at a time they marched forward, sharing joys, sorrows, responsibilities, disappointments and encouragements in the truest bond of close comradeship.



PART THREE

FRANCESCA

“Thou hast created us for Thyself, and our heart cannot be quieted till it may find repose in Thee.”

## FRANCESCA

**E**VANGELINE FRENCH was two and a half years old when baby Francesca was born. The mother being incapacitated, the buxom Flemish girl Euphrosine celebrated her brief period of authority over the troublesome child by shutting her up in the coal cellar, from whence she emerged black and tear-stained to find that a small living thing with black, curly hair and a red skin had arrived during her imprisonment. As an infant Francesca was a complete contrast to what Eva had been - a quiet, smiling, happy baby, she lay for hours in her cradle and troubled no one.

Directly she could toddle Evangeline assumed control of her, and with her baby sister as subject she experimented on the bringing up of children. She quickly got the upper hand of her small charge, from whom she exacted absolute and prompt obedience. She had carefully observed that when Francesca's mother wished to be free of the child for a time, she was laid in a crib. Now Eva wished to be free of her. Down the lane was a ditch with a magnificent growth of nettles. She thought the matter out carefully and supplied herself with a

copy of *The Times*, the sheets of which she opened out on the nettles, popped the baby into the middle, and then to her horror saw the newspaper divide and the screaming baby vanish, to be dragged out yelling and covered with nettle stings.

Under the superintendence of such a stormy mentor, little Francesca grew up somewhat subdued, and as soon as she was able to judge matters for herself, she gave her admiration to all that was quiet, calm and controlled. She was mentally precocious, shy of strangers, and a great listener to the conversation of her elders. She was never taught to read, it seemed to come instinctively, and at six years of age she was reading omnivorously in two languages. She soon found that if she was to follow all that was said she must learn to make good use of a dictionary, and in this way she managed to keep *au fait* with much that she was never intended to understand.

At St. Omer she trotted behind Eva to school in the morning, but in the afternoons nearly always came back alone, while Eva remained behind sitting at a desk writing out a French verb in all its declensions :

I was disobedient to my mistress.

Thou wert disobedient to thy mistress.

He was disobedient to his mistress. . . .

The glorious half-holidays among the fortifica-

tions were generally spent at the foot of a tree, reading a book, while Eva risked her neck in dangerous pranks. Both children recognised that it was not safe for Francesca to follow her sister in her daring scrambles, but on the other hand, she had more concentration than Eva, and soon outstripped her at school. Her successes and prizes were Eva's crown of rejoicing. She would tolerate no slacking in her young sister, and waste of time with girl companions was sternly repressed.

Each Sunday there was a French Protestant service at which Francesca, because she was small and smiling, was selected to take up the collection. No one guessed that it was her weekly purgatory to go from seat to seat holding out her little velvet bag, because it drew attention to her, and attention was the thing she most dreaded.

A new phase of life began for her when, at the age of nine, the whole family went to live in Geneva. Almost immediately after their arrival the autumn school term commenced, when she took her entrance examination to the Ecole Secondaire and was appointed her place in a very large class of children. At the same time she began music lessons at the Conservatoire and life immediately became very full, very busy, very interesting, and very happy. The classes in a large public school

pleased her vastly, and the competence of the various teachers was stimulating to the pupils.

On Sunday mornings she attended an excellently managed Sunday school for children of the professional classes, but neither at day nor Sunday school did she ever make the slightest personal contact with other scholars. When her grandfather died, her present from his library was a complete set of Charlotte Brontë's works, and her *Life* by Mrs. Gaskell. To a child so passionately fond of reading this was a haul indeed, and she sat down to read them through. *Villette* and *The Professor* were the most easily understood, for she could follow every detail of the school life they pictured. Books were among the strongest character-forming influences of Francesca's life, but none so definitely moulded her thought as the story of the Brontë family, combined with the portrait which Charlotte gave of herself in her own novels. Looking back, it seems that Francesca's first realisation of moral strength was bound up in the picture of this woman, in whom the forces of life worked so violently, yet always under a disciplined and quiet exterior.

Even as a girl, Francesca apprehended that self-expression may easily be a dissipation of strength which, stored and controlled, might accumulate sufficient energy to accomplish great things. Out

of this grew a sense that it was part of a private integrity to avoid the exaggerated or inexact use of words, nor would she give expression to anything unless she could find for it the true, sober, correct, honest phrase. As she developed, exuberance was profoundly distasteful to her, emotionalism repelled her, and such loss of control as a fit of temper was a supreme disgrace. She never had the slightest desire to be admitted to the parties and social entertainments in which her sisters found amusement, because these things offered no attraction to her. She keenly enjoyed lectures, concerts, and above all the opera, but social entertainments seemed to her to require a contribution of personal vitality which worried and exhausted her, and sent her away dissatisfied with herself and with the company which she met.

In the strong, puritanical, honest-thinking Swiss churches it was accepted that the world of sinners was separated from God by an abyss, the bridging of which must be from the other side. The preachers never indulged in misleading tosh, suggesting that a sinner might find peace with God by way of Nature's glories, the songs of birds or crimson sunsets. Emphasis was on sin and on reconciliation through Christ's sacrifice for sin, but during all the impressionable years no one ever approached Francesca with a personal appeal.

In the literary circles among which she moved, her personal contacts were with those who welcomed vivid impressions for the sake of translating them into telling literary form, but without the slightest desire of transmuting them into a character-moulding force. In spiritual things she feared this above everything, realising the deadness of reaction after emotion. Whenever she came to a decisive hour when her spiritual being might have made the great response to an approach from God, she shrank back, saying to herself: "These are your feelings and emotions to-night, but to-morrow you will wake up a different person, and with your capacity for feeling deadened by an abortive impulse." She knew her own spiritual destitution, but she knew also that no one could help her, for whatever she gained she must get for herself, and that upon a bed-rock of personal experience. There was, however, an undoubted approach from the other side of that abyss, which warned her spirit that it was made for God, and would find no satisfaction apart from Him.

The plunge from stimulating Geneva to the dull English town left her with a sense that the curtain had dropped on most of life's interests. She had only just finished her schooling, and was in the midst of her musical education, but here there was no means of study nor even a possibility of hearing



good music. There was no serious theatre, no opera, no lectures, and no possible way of continuing her education. The outlook was dreary, and the prospect barren.

Then something happened. It had been a day of nervous tension; Eva's despairing mood had blazed out into a frantic outburst and every member of her family had been involved in the wretched scene. Towards evening things simmered down, and each made an effort to pick up the ordinary trend of life. After dark Francesca slipped out into the garden to recover her equilibrium, and to ponder the seemingly hopeless situation. As she walked and thought there was a sense of immanence, and the spiritual suddenly became intensely real to her. She felt that she was in for a decisive hour; it seemed to her that the riddle of life could be solved if she had the right of appeal to God, the Controller of men's hearts. He could deal with the thing impossible to her. She knew that if she left this great matter unsettled now, the hour might not come again. She was profoundly conscious that she had no right of access to God, unless the act of reconciliation had taken place. The old warning was there: "It is all right for to-night, but when you wake up in the morning you may be a different person." Then her spirit rose to it

and she said : " I am helpless about this matter of to-morrow, but if I am saved I must also be kept." By an act of faith she flung herself on grace, and found herself on the breast of God.

For an hour she walked to and fro, taking the whole burden and laying it upon Him. Then she went in to find the family circle as before, each one occupied with his own affairs. She had no impulse or desire to proclaim to the household what had happened. A little later the family scattered and she and Eva went up to the room which they shared. Eva always expressed herself more easily to her younger sister than to others, and now she began to pour it all out, the gloom, the discontent, the hopelessness, everything, everywhere, all wrong and no possibility of righting it. At last she exclaimed : " I wish I could take the whole misery of the world upon me and jump into the sea with it."

Something within Francesca said : " This is your opportunity; if you take it, it will be the seal of to-night's transaction; if you miss it your chance is gone." So she opened those reticent lips and said : " You don't need to do that, Eva, Christ has already done it on the Cross." Eva turned, stared, and collapsed like a pricked bubble; then she said lamely : " Oh, I didn't mean it that way."

Nothing more was said, but a few days later

Evangeline herself yielded to the claims of Christ and became such a red-hot propagandist that Francesca's little rush-like witness sank into insignificance. A little later she, with Eva, taught in the Sunday school and visited in the slums, but her Christian activities scarcely counted, so completely were they overshadowed by the fiery zeal of the erstwhile pessimist.

A year later a series of swift events scattered the household, until from five members they were reduced to two. The eldest sister married, and shortly afterwards Eva, having been accepted by the China Inland Mission for training, left home for Deaconess House, Liverpool. Her mother took her as far as London, arranging to spend the night there and return next day. For twenty-four hours Francesca was left alone with her father. On the first day he seemed in his usual health, and next morning he walked four miles, then came home to lunch, but before he had finished the meal was seized with acute pain in his heart. He went up to his bedroom and with Francesca standing by his side gave one gasp and fell back dead.

In that hour her God commanded her strength.

Francesca now realised that her place must be at home, to live with her mother. After such a complete break-up of the family circle, they both

felt the need for a change, and as quickly as possible they moved to Richmond, Surrey.

Life would have run in a peaceful channel but that an eccentric old uncle decided to live with them for a time. His religious life had been a series of wild tackings, in the course of which his craft had alternately touched the rocks of Non-conformity, the deep waters of Brethrenism and the shallows of Anglo-Catholicism. With the death of his wife, the moorings which held him to this latter shore slackened, and there were signs of putting out to sea on a further venture. The vagaries of his spiritual tacks were never so much influenced by the attraction of any particular sect as by the intense antagonism which he developed for those he had already touched.

For the time being his virulence centred on Francesca, whose peculiar detestability lay in her ease of fellowship with Christians of every sect. Once, in an unguarded moment, the term "invisible Church" was used in his presence. He leapt from his chair in a frenzy of protest, and snapping his fingers loudly within two inches of the speaker's face, yelled: "Invisible Church indeed! I would not give you *that* for an invisible Church."

Francesca was giving a good deal of time to the

study of music, and was now a pupil of Professor Michael Hambourg. This necessitated many hours of piano practice, which became such an annoyance to her uncle that he thought out a deep plan by which his niece's music could be silenced, her theology rectified, her unwelcome presence dispensed with, and a quiet home secured for him with the undivided attentions of his sister.

One morning he broached the subject: "Mother Agnes of the White Sisterhood is a most *charming* woman," he began. "So quiet and well-bred" (this with a vicious look at Francesca). "She never raises her voice. All the sisters under her learn decorum. They embroider priests' vestments and polish the church brasses most beautifully. It is a great favour to be admitted to the Order and the privilege is only extended to women of good family. It costs money too, as each sister supplies a dowry." Then, clearing his throat, he continued: "If that dowry were forthcoming, would you, Francesca, like to enter the Order and devote your life to such good works?"

The generous offer was not accepted and before long he moved on to the house of another relative, while Francesca and her mother resumed their simple, quiet life.

Of the various Richmond churches, the one that

attracted them most was Holy Trinity, where the Rev. Evan Hopkins was vicar. There was no doubt that he preached powerfully, but he constantly spoke of spiritual things in a way that Francesca could not follow. She was touching vital forces, but for lack of the key of understanding, only received limited benefit from them. The key was given to her when she went with Eva to the Keswick Convention that same year. There she learned this one thing – that she, in her tripartite being, was the Temple of the Holy Spirit, and that the cleansing and daily care of that Temple was His responsibility, so that the service of God might be performed there in a seemly and acceptable way. With the illumination of her mind, the Holy Spirit ceased to be a vague, ghostly influence, and became Master of the Temple.

She was only away from Richmond for eight days, but she returned a new creature. She felt like a person who had lived in a small, secluded garden and who, walking there one day, saw a hitherto unnoticed gate which, with the key in her hand, she opened, and stepped into a limitless expanse, which was all hers to explore, to occupy and to enjoy. The power of this discovery was a new strength to life. She reached home on Saturday evening and the next day went, as usual, to Mr. Evan Hopkins's

church. To her delight, she found that she was now able to understand what he said, and from this time his preaching was a great help to her. Every time he came into his pulpit his heart was inditing some great matter, and there was never anything commonplace, slovenly or trivial about his preaching.

Francesca was quickly roped in to help in the regular channels of Church work. She was supplied with a district, a Sunday school class, and, seeing that her missionary zeal was out of the ordinary, her name was put down as collector for the Missionary Society in a wide residential area. In none of these activities did she prove a success. She began to find that she was not cut out for a good district visitor; in Sunday school she was all right with younger children, but it was a mistake to put her to lead the Bible Class.

As for collecting the missionary subscriptions, that proved the greatest catastrophe of all. It was plain sailing where the donors were people who gave willingly and joyfully of their substance for the extension of the Kingdom of God, but when she arrived to find some who had been more or less coerced into promising a subscription, or had done so on a wave of enthusiasm which had retreated and left them stranded with an unwelcome obligation, she felt that honesty required her to say: "If

you do not want to give, please keep your money." Strange to say, many people jumped at the suggestion and subscriptions fell off appallingly. In the end she felt she ought to tender her resignation from this particular office, which she found was gratefully accepted. It had been recognised that if she held it much longer the loss in subscriptions might be irretrievable.

The Spirit of God which bloweth where it listeth, stirred Richmond through the Young Women's Christian Association. The secretary, Jessie Penn Lewis, was a soul on fire. The frailest of women, her body seemed only to hold together just sufficiently to keep her spirit from complete liberation. She worked, studied, prayed and thought, then took all the very best of her findings and poured them out in the classes and meetings she took among the Y.W.C.A. members. Needless to say that what she sowed she reaped, and there grew up around her a constantly enlarging circle of women who kept pace with her and went on to prove the power of God's Holy Spirit in every phase of life.

Things happened thick and fast, until the influence of the Richmond branch of the Young Women's Christian Association was felt to the uttermost parts of the earth. Souls were saved, lives were changed, testimony was released, and



the fire spread as many of its members scattered to earth's remotest bounds. The Richmond churches benefited, but never acknowledged how much they owed to the woman in the midst, whose fervent prayer and ardent faith was bending bows of brass. Francesca found her own congenial sphere of Christian work within this group. The members stood by each other, and in speaking together their conversation was more naturally of the things of God than of the things of the world.

On the home side of her life she was associating with artists and writers, men and women of all shades of thought, some of whom were utterly ruthless in their rebellion against conventionalities, and what they pleased to call the artificial restrictions of conduct. Francesca moved among them strangely, listening to their talk, joining with them in debate, reading as widely and thinking more fearlessly than any of them, for she dared to think of God. To them she was a quaint Puritan, whose rules of conduct were laughable. She would neither go to theatres, play cards, nor join in a multitude of their ordinary forms of enjoyment, and a queer notion about not travelling on Sunday excluded her from many of their more interesting gatherings. She stubbornly held her own with them, and solved the intricate difficulties of the position by a simple rule

of life : as a follower of Christ it was her duty to associate with those who formed the circle of her normal life, and part of her witness was to discuss with them and allow her mind to think out the problems which their conversation suggested. When, however, they were bent on pleasure and fun, they inevitably did things which, for her, were questionable, and she must keep out of it or she would be swept further into the stream than was safe. Probably their opinion of her was best expressed in the words of a well-known man of letters who, at the close of a debate in which they had been set against one another on a moral question, fiercely said : " The opposer of to-night's motion, ought, in my opinion, to be burned for heresy at Smithfield."

In the early summer of 1900, when her family were just beginning to think of Evangeline's first furlough, the news of the Boxer rebellion, and of her great danger, burst upon them. By June they already knew that all the Shansi missionaries were in danger, and after that, all the news that came was bad. The China Inland Mission was making every effort to keep near relatives informed of the condition of affairs, and the newspapers were soon giving a column a day to matters of the Boxer riots, the reports of which became more and more alarming. As months went by and missionaries

shut up in that province had no possible means of getting a word out, their relatives could only picture them as enduring sufferings which would be worse than death. Before long news began to filter through that one and another of Eva's friends had been massacred, and finally her name appeared in the daily paper as one of the victims.

The weekly prayer meeting of the China Inland Mission was a heart-rending gathering; parents, relatives and friends of that great company of men and women who were in such peril, gathered together in utter anguish of spirit. In some ways those who knew that their children were killed were in less distress than the others. - The anxiety was almost beyond endurance, and the staff of the China Inland Mission had to bear the strain of receiving all bad news, and then breaking it to relatives. In spite of Eva's name being in the papers as having been killed, the secretaries of the Mission urged her family not to despair of her safety, as they had no confirmation of the news, and believed their sources of information to be more reliable than those to which the newspapers had access. Each day, however, hope shrank, and finally the members of the family spoke very little to each other about their ever-present anxiety, for mother and daughter knew each other's feelings to be beyond expression. One Sunday

Francesca was so conscious of peril threatening her sister that she made a note of the date, thinking it not improbable that she had been killed at that time.

Weeks passed into months and then, one morning, a telegraph boy knocked at the door. Francesca went to take the message from his hand, prepared to receive the news before she conveyed it to her mother. What she read was: "Your daughter arrived Hankow safe." Months later when they met again, she found that her intuition of danger was on the very day when Eva had been mauled by the Boxers.

Thus personal anxiety came to an end, but the suffering which Eva French's mother endured that summer was her death-blow, and from that time her health steadily declined. The long-drawn-out agony sapped her strength, and she was never able to fully recover it. Moreover, the fact that Eva was safe made her realise all the more poignantly the despair of others whose children had suffered cruelties never to be told in detail. The next news received was that Eva was sailing for Europe, and a few weeks later she was home once more.

It was a very much subdued Evangeline French who quietly slipped back into the family circle. She was suffering acutely from shock, produced by the long strain of physical and mental suffering. Looking into the future of her missionary life there

was nothing there to buoy her up or exhilarate her. Most of her friends had been cruelly murdered, and she was down to the dead level of stern reality. When she was asked the question so perpetually and so thoughtlessly put to missionaries on furlough: "Are you not longing to get back to your work?" she fell silent, for she could not honestly say "yes," and to have answered "no" would give a wrong impression.

Whatever duty lay before her in China was an unrelenting one, and she could but dread what it might involve for her. Her physical nature craved for rest, and her mental being for recreation, but on the spiritual side she was not quite ready to get enjoyment, or much help, from meetings and sermons. She was replete with spiritual experience of such depth and intensity that she only asked silence and solitude wherewith to measure its immensity, and the most recuperative period she had was a long holiday in Norway, where she roamed at will on a beautiful island in a lonely fjord, far from claims which press upon the missionary on furlough.

She was fully prepared to go back when the time should come, but now she counted the cost to the uttermost farthing and knew that the hardest thing which lay before her was not personal suffering, but to be required to inflict further pain on those who were dearest to her.

It was a sad parting, for all knew it was unlikely she would see her mother again, and it was tacitly admitted that Eva was facing a life of utter loneliness, and one which was penurious in relation to many legitimate cravings of her nature. Much as her mother felt losing her, she had no hesitation in giving an unquestioning consent to her return, for she felt that this was owing to the Chinese Christians, some of whom had risked their lives to save her; but after Eva had left, strength gradually declined. Before very long she was walking among the first shadows of that dark valley, where mortal dissolution prepares the spirit to be clothed upon with immortality.

All the self-control so laboriously acquired in her youth now stood Francesca in good stead, and she was the staff on which her mother leaned. When she closed her eyes in death, Francesca was thirty-four years old. A chapter in her life was closed, one whole section of life's responsibilities had been faithfully discharged, what the future held for her was not yet revealed. At the moment she could make no decisions, nor could she immediately pick up the thread of life. She must wait until the next step was made clear, and in order to gain time and strength for the further journey, she disappeared into a quiet village for some months.

PART FOUR

THE TRIO

**"A threefold cord is not quickly broken."**



## THE TRIO

**F**AR away, in the interior of China, Eva French and Mildred Cable were living together in happy companionship. There had been those who prophesied trouble when one with so much driving force was put to work with another undoubtedly characterised by indomitable will power. "When there is serious difference of opinion who will carry the day?" they asked. Many watched for the inevitable clash, and they watched in vain. Peace and harmony reigned in the busy home whose two occupants seemed made to complement each other. One contributed a fresh fount of ideas, which the other tested in the crucible of experience, and from the result arose developments which were to the benefit of all.

A tremendous task lay before them. The awful catastrophe of the Boxer outbreak had left the Church paralysed with shock, and while some were stronger and more robust for the experience, others seemed unable to recover themselves. It was necessary for the missionaries to stay in every village, visit every Christian home, and spend long hours in listening to heart-rending stories, before it was possible even to begin with encouragement,

advice or exhortation. Eva French was at her best in this work, and the experience which Mildred Cable gained as she sat, a silent listener, was the finest training she could possibly have had.

The two friends prayed, discussed and conferred, and then decided that what the Church needed at this time was the stimulus of a new step forward. There were hundreds of girls in Christian homes who had no hope of even learning to read and write. As they went round the villages, the Christian parents begged for a girls' school with such insistence that they yielded. The school would be Mildred's special sphere, and with such an immeasurable evangelistic opportunity she saw visions of great things that might be. It was with reluctance that she saw curtailment of the happy, free village tours, but she accepted the exacting demands of institutional life, confident that they constituted her immediate duty, and set herself to the initial task of training her first band of teachers. They were all young women of exceptional strength of character, each had a personal experience of conversion, and they were to her a joy and crown of glory. She worked and they worked, and together they carried to a successful issue a task which at the commencement looked almost impossible.

In later years when visitors walked round the

large compound and saw the school organisation working so smoothly through every grade, from kindergarten to normal training, it was hard for them to realise that all this had grown from the first summer school when Mildred Cable, herself far from proficient in the language, sat with half a dozen Chinese girls around her, teaching them the first elements of arithmetic and geography, and at the same time inspiring them with a great enthusiasm for the task to which they, and she, had been called together by God. For seven strenuous years they toiled unceasingly and during that period the Church grew exceedingly, and that other department of women's education, the Bible School, came into being.

Eva passed through that bitter experience of hearing week by week of her mother's decreasing strength and, before she was able to take furlough, of her death. Eva's English home was broken up, Mildred shrank from renewing old contacts, and for neither could the thought of furlough be dissociated from pain.

When, after crossing Siberia, they landed at dingy, grimy Liverpool Street Station and found there was no one to meet them, and that no one apparently knew of their arrival, they clung to each other for protection in a whirling multitude, each

one of which seemed so competent, so absorbed and so bent on his own business that there was no place for the two waifs who had even forgotten their way about London.

Of course telegrams had miscarried, and anxious relatives were keeping the telephone busy, trying to find out by what Channel route they were to be expected. It ended in Evangeline being carried off to Mildred's home and Francesca being summoned by telegram to come to her.

“ So this is Mildred Cable ! ”

“ And you are Francesca ! ”

The two women looked at each other with a long, searching glance before which neither flinched from the other's scrutiny. They stood in the porch of Mildred's home, for, at the sound of the door bell, she had rushed out to welcome her friend's sister.

Eva was fast asleep upstairs, exhausted by the stormy night crossing, but a little later they were all three together with a large family party. There was any amount of lively talk, but three of the company were conscious that great issues were at stake, and that this was a crucial hour.

Francesca observed, and saw that there was a greater intimacy between Eva and Mildred than she had ever yet met between two friends. She

could not see them together without detecting a deep and subtle understanding which indicated oneness of instinct and purpose. "Such a union," she thought, "may, in God's hands, accomplish so great things that there certainly will be inimical forces whose purpose it is to mar the friendship. I must be careful to have no part in anything which is calculated to hurt it."

Mildred knew Eva so well as to completely understand her feelings towards Francesca, and during the months when such sad letters had come from home she had shared with Eva the knowledge of Francesca's suffering. She watched them both and determined that so far as in her lay, nothing should be allowed which would cause pain to either sister. "If our friendship reveals an exclusive element it will bring unhappiness to both, but if there be nothing of the kind, the relationship between the three of us might develop and grow into something better than we have yet known."

Eva sat and looked at her friend, and then at her sister, and thought: "If these two can only get to know each other they will fit, but how easily they may glance off, and never come into vital contact."

From the first moment all three behaved with complete honesty, simplicity and truthfulness.

Fortunately for their future happiness no one sentimentalised, and no one pretended anything at all.

By the close of that long afternoon each one knew that a big thing had happened. Three lives, each one of which had been drastically disciplined by a loving Father, were to be twisted by His hands into a three-fold cord, which could not easily be broken.

. . . . .

Most of the things which Francesca French felt deeply she never put into words ; among them was the intensely coveted privilege of being commissioned to proclaim Christ among the heathen, but she could never have borne to suggest that her mother's life stood between her and a possible call, therefore her desire had never been spoken. There were, however, some things which her mother did not require to be told, and she had made up her mind that Francesca, at her age, would find the mission field a trying place.

Therefore when she died, of set and deliberate purpose, she left her a home with several years of lease to run. It was her way of saying to her daughter : " My child, you have fulfilled your responsibilities, now do not take on yourself hardships which will press on you quite differently

to what they would have done when you were a young girl. Be satisfied to live in comfort, and serve God in the state in which it shall please Him to call you."

It was kind and well meant, but it was mistaken, and the finger of God pointed otherwise. Something happened. As the mother lay dying a little crack appeared in a wall of the house, which widened and grew apace, so that when the end had come, the owner was grateful to relieve Francesca of the remaining years of lease, and set himself to salvage the building. Thus, without having to take any step, she found herself relieved of the property, which must have been a great handicap to her plans. Within three weeks the furniture had been disposed of, and she was an unhampered woman. After a holiday in the country she filled up the remaining time, until her sister's furlough, with nursing, which she loved as intensely as Eva had disliked it.

The life of a hospital nurse was so congenial to her that nothing but the commission to be a missionary would have drawn her away from it, but there was one aspect against which her mind constantly rebelled. It was to see patients come and go, bear the terror and strain of operations, descend to the very gates of death and no place be

allowed for other than organised religious ritual, in that tremendous hour. It was searing to the soul of a Christian nurse, to have only surreptitious means of speaking to her patients about God and eternity, and no time or opportunity when she might seek to lead the dying to their Saviour.

After the three met, still not a word passed her lips about going to China but, during the long minute in which she and Mildred Cable looked into the depths of each other's eyes, unformulated questions were met by unspoken answers, and she was not surprised when, some time later, the question was asked: "What about China?"

Guidance had always come to her by way of the strictly rational, and when the council of the China Inland Mission wished to know how she received her call, she could only answer: "God would not have taught me that the evangelisation of the world is the function of the Church, and then removed one by one the obstacles from my path, if He had not intended me to step forward in the way which He opened before me." Some members of the council seemed to question the definiteness of a call which came so simply, but it was ever so, for her. Direction was never given as from a glaring arc-light, but by the glimmer of such a little oil lamp, as threw a circumference of light, only enough for



the next step. She was beyond the age limit, but the way was made easy for her by the fact of her good health, so that the doctor, while he was turning down younger candidates, accepted her without hesitation.

They certainly never styled themselves "The Trio," and scarcely know how they came to be called by that name, but in time it was evident that by this title their friends referred to them. It was undeniably appropriate, because the three people were equally involved in the fulfilment of the commission, so the Trio they remain.

The Chinese had their own way of saying it, and it leaked out one morning at prayer meeting, when an earnest petition was voiced for blessing on "our three-in-one teachers."

Later, when they went to Kansu, the City of Prodigals had a saying all ready for them, for "to stick like Suchow\* glue" is the Central Asian proverb which was immediately applied to the friendship which bound together as one Feng Precious Pearl, Kai All Brave and Feng Polished Jade, to give them their Chinese names.

The journey to China was the first of many delightful wanderings which they have since

\* Suchow.—Chinese name for City of Prodigals.

enjoyed together. It began with a pilgrimage to Francesca's birth-place in Bruges, then turned off to Brussels, to Cologne, and to Berlin with its art galleries. Moscow, which was then the city of churches and shrines, held them for as many days as passport regulations permitted, then came the long, quiet journey across Siberia, and Francesca had her first introduction to China in romantic Peking. From here they plunged inland, and finally the mule-litters swung into the mission compound at Hwochow, which to Eva and Mildred was home. A crowd of joyful converts was gathered to welcome them, and to satisfy curiosity regarding "the second Miss Feng," as Francesca was to be called.

She was now a member of the most Christian household of which she had ever formed part. The School existed for the sole purpose of educating the daughters of Christians and bringing them up in the fear and admonition of the Lord; the Women's School bore the title "Bible School," and from these two institutions there streamed out a constant flow of Christian workers of every kind.

But it was not only the contacts of the immediate household, but acquaintance with circles of fellow-missionaries that amazed her by the undiluted quality of their Christianity. They were kinder, more hospitable and more unselfish than any

people she had ever met. She observed in many of their houses a motto hanging on the wall which declared :

*Christ is the Head of this House,  
The Unseen Guest at every meal,  
The Silent Listener to every conversation,*

and the families evidently set out to make this thing true; yet sometimes as meals progressed and conversation took its course, Francesca became conscious of an unwritten law, which forbade the expression of anything to which anybody present might not give whole-hearted agreement. Again and again she began to say things with intention to draw spiritual illumination from those whom she felt ought to be her teachers, but a tremor in the eye of her hostess warned her she was nearing the rocks, and she fell silent.

She would look at the motto and say to herself: "If my Lord were indeed sitting at the head of this table as Listener to, and Sharer in, all our talk, how freely we should express ourselves to Him, and all of us would drop our masks and come out with thoughts bolder than we knew we had it in us to think." It was also among her fellow-missionaries that she first learnt that timid phrase: "It might be misunderstood . . ." – such a dangerous point

of view, it seemed to her, as translated into action might lead one anywhere.

Strange to relate these same people were as bold as lions in facing and fighting the cruelties, the vices and the horrors of heathendom, and were prepared to die for their faith. Yet among these were some men and women of whom the world was not worthy, who, in the realm of thought, feared their own shadows. She saw for herself that there was truth in what she once heard pithily expressed: "The Christian army is the only one where the soldiers are more afraid of each other than they are of the enemy."

Great interest was taken in the reappearance of Evangeline and Mildred, with a third person who was sister to one and whose relation to the other was complicated by the fact that, though her senior in years, she would be her junior in Mission standing. Would it work? Many questioned it. By the grace of God it did work, and that not by reason of similarity of tastes nor by easy yieldingness of temperaments. There was unity in the deepest things, but dissimilarity in most of those that appeared above the surface. Without complete mutual confidence and bed-rock sincerity, the thing could never have been, nor would it have worked if there had not happened to each one that which made the will of God her final court of appeal.

Gradually, and without any spoken arrangement, the different parts learned to fit in and make the best use of any resources of talent, equipment and money which were at their common disposal. The work was far too important to be held up, or even enfeebled, because of some rigid or artificial rule of precedence, and the communal basis on which the three lived finally prevented any one from looming larger than the other, as the talents, gifts and qualifications of each were a common possession of all. Concerning money, there was never a question. It was a trust to be used as directed by, and for, the Lord Who gave it.

They were all tough fighters for a measure of their own way, but when any one of them saw the other deliberately yielding her right, it so emptied victory of pleasure, that she only coveted to have an equal share in yielding also. The harmony which has existed for more than a quarter of a century, and the joys of friendship, have been Christ's "hundred-fold more in this present," for the Trio.

They have often seen themselves depicted in the similitude of the mule team, which has drawn them over so many mountains, through such dangerous rivers and across burning desert plains. The alert beast in the traces gets the first flick of the whip when there is difficulty ahead. She responds with

a bound, but before the impetus of her pull has slackened, the driver has touched the steady reliable mule in the shafts, which can be counted on to brace itself to bear the strain. Then the two pull together to one purpose and one end, but without the third mule, hitched so as to get an equal share of the weight, the mountain pass would never be crossed, nor the exhaustion of the wearisome plain endured. The beasts of the team do not select each other, that is the driver's business, as it is his also to give the signals.

. . . . .

What a hardworking household it was, that Hwochow Compound. Long before daylight the first gong sounded, and everyone was astir. Breakfast was before sunrise, and any chance of quiet was gone by the time its two hundred members met for family prayers. From kindergarten to normal training-school they sat in rows, these children of the Church. Some looked different from others, different in type and in dress. They were the pupils whose homes were in distant provinces, and who had been selected for a training which was to fit them for the posts of teachers in their own localities. The quiet, self-respecting women students of the Bible school were turning down the leaves of their Bibles, fearful lest they be

so slow in finding the place, as to miss the first line of the reading. In each of their hands was a stumpy blue pencil ready to mark the passage, and every face was intent.

There were all sorts of people there, but the most weird were the patients of the Women's Opium Refuge. Old Mother Ma marshalled them in like a hen fussing over a brood of chicks. They were pathetically anxious to do everything right, and not to seem out of place in this wonderful assembly. There was always some village mother spending the night, and she looked with pride at the stodgy daughter, who was probably the last in her class, but destined, in her mother's vision, to a brilliant career as school teacher.

Prayers over, the courts were suddenly alive with teachers and pupils, each intent on her individual business, and there was no pause till the bell rang for mid-morning recess. At one o'clock the big household ate, consuming a hundred pounds of flour a day and revelling in the tasty messes which were each one's portion.

The afternoon was more varied, games for some, sewing for others, and classes for seniors. Teams of preachers, the more experienced taking charge of the younger women, left the compound on every kind of evangelistic errand. To those who were

the organisers and administrators the task was never-ending. Who could calculate the extras, the unexpected, the unforeseen incidents of each day? There would most certainly be a long sitting with the Chinese pastor who asked help in finding the scriptural solution to some knotty Church problem. In so large a community there might any time be a difficulty and a temperamental clash which meant interviews, reprimands and exhortations. The missionary might be called to the bedside of a sick convert, or even be summoned to deal with the horrors of demon possession. Not till the gong sounded "Lights out" did the buzzing hive subside into quiet.

Through days, weeks, months and years the exacting but joyous life went on. Each year saw a fresh band of young women pass out to a life career. Terms came and terms went with a regularity which made time fly, and before she realised it the headmistress was receiving as pupils the children of her old girls. Church conferences, baptisms and the round of examinations spun by, but each year there was some occasion by which it was recalled, some special meeting or effort, when it was the missionary's unspeakable joy to see those for whom she had toiled and prayed, decide for Christ. It might be young children giving themselves to the Lord



before other masters had held dominion over them, or grey-haired women who had stood all the day idle, because no man had hired them, taking service under the Lord of the Vineyard.

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Full enjoyment of holiday is reserved as a reward for those who know the grind of diligent toil, and when the last examination papers had been corrected, the last pupil had left for her home and the last report been written out, then the Trio set out to play, with friends who brought the same holiday spirit from their own busy stations. They all met in a little village perched high in the hills and exposed to all the winds of heaven, or in a quiet valley of water-mills where they laid aside the exacting demands of their everyday task. The freedom, the break from routine, the mirth of joyful company, released the mind overstrained by too great concentration.

One summer there was a five-days' retreat in the Valley of Water-mills. Everything was done to secure complete withdrawal from the ordinary ways of life, and simple meals were provided for a large party of missionaries who camped out in the courtyard, through which the mill-race rushed. A rule of silence was respected, and there was almost no preaching, but much reading of the Scripture, leisure

for meditation and opportunity for silent prayer. There was joyful singing, and during the periods of intercession the group was so gripped by the power of the Spirit, that all were conscious of something happening. Something certainly happened to the Trio.

There was present a woman just back from the distant North-West province of Kansu, where she had glimpsed the magnitude of the unevangelised areas. One day she voiced an importunate reminder of the great cities where the name of Christ was not even known. As the prayer-meeting went on, there was a mighty shaking of hearts, and at the close all knew that some wall of Jericho came tumbling down that day. The holiday over, all went back to work, but the claims of that unevangelised land on the Trio could not be stifled, so they bought a map of Kansu and put it on the wall as a reminder.

Something had to be done, and someone had to do it. As they mused the fire burned, and a letter was written to the person who could best give them the information they required. Their question was this: "Are the conditions in the North-West such that experienced, middle-aged missionaries, with a working knowledge of the Chinese language, would be useful, or do they more definitely demand young people who lack experience, but have greater

physical vigour?" The answer was unequivocal: "Experience, in this case, is more valuable than youth," and, strengthened by this confirmation, the Trio forthwith wrote a letter to the Mission authorities, volunteering for service in the unevangelised areas of China's great North-West.

It was the beginning of a correspondence distressing to all concerned. They were up against one of the more difficult aspects of guidance, for it seemed as though the people concerned were being led diversely. This could not be recognised as a part of Divine procedure, and the only way to unmask the satanic deception was to stand still and wait for true light to break through, show the path, and unify the purposes of all God's servants who were concerned.

For twelve months they waited on the issue, unable to withdraw, because the hand of God pointed onward, and unwilling to advance until they could do so with the consent of those whose authority they recognised.

Even though the correspondence was confidential, the secret leaked out and many people took strong sides, which only helped to confuse the issue. Some wrote, saying in more or less parliamentary language, that there were no fools like old fools. Others asked the junior members of the party if

they had visualised what it would be to have the senior die on their hands, and know that they had been the cause of the disaster. There were those who simply received a superficial impression that after twenty-one years of grind the Trio wanted a change. The postman was busy bringing suggestions of the varied spheres which they might fill, until it became a source of amusement that they should be considered suitable to such a variety of duties; but the manifold propositions, the insistent urgings and distracting suggestions were enough to deceive the very elect, and to wear out their tired spirits.

This year of uncertainty was spent in the valley of humiliation but at last the consent they expected came, and when it came, true to the courageous lines laid down in the constitution of the China Inland Mission, it bade them go forward and preach, wherever God should lead them.

The Trio went forward, but the one place on earth which was home had to be abandoned, and everything which bore the value of association must be handed over to others. The aged Chinese pastor, on hearing the news, laid his head on his hands and sobbed like a child. School teachers were stunned, and converts begged the missionaries not to leave them.

As time narrowed in, the emotions escaped from

control and everything was poignant. "This is the last Christmas we shall spend together," "the last time we shall see our courtyard vine in blossom," "the last closing of term," "the last Communion Service"; then "Farewell, farewell." It was over, and with bleeding hearts they plunged into the unknown.

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Immediately every manner of doubt was released on them. Each indication of guidance, each leading was suddenly made to look trivial, uncertain, unreliable. Every earnest of a commission ahead was called into question and when, in the final issue, one of the three broke a wrist, another snapped a tendon and they journeyed on, maimed and halt, they were utterly silenced towards those who called it a fool's errand and who now might well consider themselves justified by events.

It was well for the Trio that there were some few who stood by them, prayed for them, encouraged them and held over them the shield of faith. Among these was one friend who seemed specially appointed to strengthen them in their darkest hours. Her friendship with Francesca was of long standing and dated from a day when, sitting in a shelter on a very lonely shore, she and her mother, in pursuit of one of the long debates which their souls loved, were turning a subject to and fro,

trying, by viewing it in its every facet, to gain that general aspect which would come nearest to the complete truth.

They thought themselves alone when, suddenly, an incisive voice cut into the discussion. It came from a lady sitting at right angles to them, who was hidden behind her own glass partition. She had been a silent listener to the talk for as long as she could refrain from breaking in. At a certain point, however, convention yielded to compulsion, and she burst in with an adroit rebuke to the younger woman for what she was pleased to call her "specious arguments." For the next hour the discussion raged, for neither would yield an inch, and an acquaintanceship begun under such propitious circumstances could scarcely fail to ripen. This was the commencement of a mental and spiritual intimacy between Francesca and this lady which resulted in great things for the Trio.

The Lady of the Shelter had a master mind, dominated by the Spirit of God. Sternly limited in her physical activities by ill-health, her body was mostly tied to a sofa in her own comfortable home, but her mind roamed among things cosmic and æonian. By the exercise of her powers of spiritual and mental insight she was able to co-ordinate facts which to the ordinary person appeared

insignificant, sorting them and giving to each its correct place in the general plan. At the given moment the scriptural key would be accurately fitted to the lock of world-politics and the ray of light released by the most recent discovery of science, so focussed as to illumine the Christian path and the conflict which besets it.

Through the Babel of confused voices which made it almost impossible to distinguish between the suggestions of the Holy Spirit, the promptings of one's own desire and those of other people's interference, simple clear words came to the Trio from this prophet of God, which restored order and dispersed confusion.

"I have seemed from the very first," she wrote, "to grasp the inner movement of your hearts in the matter of your move to Kansu and have felt its imperativeness. But then we share the same spirit of prophecy, and that acts as an amazing eye-opener. I feel the urgency of the currents of spiritual forces set into motion by your message to that province, coming, as it evidently does, in a pause before a storm. There is something very remarkable about this call—the place and the moment and the quality of your triple service. Evidently there are unique links here, forged back in the spirit and brought forth now in the body.

There ought to emerge from this a piece of clean-cut, apostolic work before the great trial comes. Anyhow, you will feel full of confidence, full of calmness and power, the Lord being with you and with your hearers, to re-create souls and bring them to the birth. . . .

“These are days of fear. These are days of psychic suggestion. These are days of old, old boggy tales coming back to paralyse, to haunt and to confuse – most of all to confuse. Satan makes up old ghosts into new ones and people are mystified and nervous, and it all helps him. Have none of it! Our souls and bodies are redeemed, bought back; only the body is left to wear the veil so that it should not yet see all things as they really are, and thus have no need of faith. Satan will lose, lose everything. Therefore we are free, and being so we claim from God absolute freedom from satanic tormenting, because Jesus the Messiah reigns.”

These were remarkable words to come from the quiet surroundings of a continental hotel, the more so as the one who wrote them had never set foot in China. The reiterated message which she delivered at that time was the urgency of going forward without delay, being neither hindered, confused nor side-tracked. “For,” she urged,



“you have barely time to fulfil your commission. Commit it to God that you be kept from doing anything, except to take His message to the people whom He has prepared to hear it.”

At that time the provinces of North-West Kansu and Turkestan were the quietest parts of the Chinese Republic, but she was alert to the first indications of coming events and detected their inevitable trend to be conflagration and revolution, with their handmaids, brigandage and massacre. By the end of a decade it had all come to pass, and there are thousands who heard the Gospel during that time who will never hear it again from human lips. They lie dead in razed cities and on Gobi battlefields.

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There were three ways of travel open to the North-West : by camel across the desert of Mongolia, by raft up the Yellow River, or by cart over the main road. The last was chosen. None of the routes were safe and the Chinese authorities insisted upon military escort through brigand-infested areas. Accustomed to thinking of journeys in terms of days, it needed some adjustment to realise that the carts in which they left the railhead would, a month later, still be carrying them on. They passed by many mission stations and at last reached the provincial capital of Kansu. Here, it

being the depth of winter, a month of halt was called among fellow-workers whose kindness and hospitality was a brimming bowl. In more than one place the question was asked :

“ What is your destination ? ”

“ We do not know,” they answered.

“ Have you not been appointed anywhere ? ”

“ No, not yet.”

“ Then may not this be the end of your quest ? ”

“ We have no indication that it is.”

“ But the need here is great, and in an area where you travel seven days from one station to the next, there is surely scope for pioneer work.”

Everything their friends said was so true and so reasonable that the three women had not a word to answer, and passed on feeling foolish and visionary, yet knowing perfectly well in their inner consciousness that they must courageously move forward until they reached the place of God's appointment.

One more week's journey brought them to the furthest North-West outpost of the China Inland Mission. At this point they looked out over the land which separated them from the next missionaries, and that was two months' journey ahead. The view was expanding, the horizons were widening. Suddenly the fog lifted.

PART FIVE

AMONG THE PRODIGALS

“ Something lost behind the Ranges. Over Yonder !  
Go you there ! ”

## AMONG THE PRODIGALS

IT was midwinter in the icebound Tibetan passes. The lamasery was set in a sheltered place, but the gripping cold of the still air was intense. When blizzard or snow-storm swept down no one ventured out, but on this sunny winter day the young Living Buddha, wrapped in his sheep-skin, sat for a while on a boulder, sunning himself. He suddenly stood, startled, for in the far distance he saw six horsemen moving in single file up the ravine, and his eagle eye detected that they were Chinese. "Not our own people," he murmured. "What business have they here? This is no time for collecting taxes. What kind of trouble can it be?"

Three of his lamas were out feeding the vultures, which was part of their daily duty, for the birds of prey must be encouraged where it is lamasery business to dispose of human carrion. They turned back at the sight of the cavalcade, excited and anxious, but reassured when one old man came riding ahead, for they recognised in him a certain farmer who often came that way to buy horses, and who spoke their tongue. He shouted a greeting

and all the red-shawled lamas came pouring out of the dark hall and surrounded him.

"These men," he explained, "are not here on official business. They are religious men. They call themselves Christians and you have no need to be afraid of them."

The Living Buddha was a quiet, courteous young man and he gave orders for rooms to be swept and braziers to be lighted. The horsemen were half-frozen with the cold, but there was comfort inside, sitting round the glowing firewood, drinking hot tea with a lump of butter floating in it, and sharing their own white bread with their host. The room was packed with inquisitive lamas, amazed to find that these Chinese men had come up to their mountain-side on purpose to pray, and yet required no lama services in reading liturgies or burning incense.

"We are not like you," said their leader. "We worship the one living God, Who made heaven and earth. He dwells in no temple made with hands, and all these hills belong to Him." As the Living Buddha heard these words he nodded his head in acquiescence, dimly apprehending their truth.

This group of Chinese men were members of a small Christian community in a city of the plain. They had all come to Christ through the preaching of the one man who was their leader, and who had

brought them up here to pray about the apparently insuperable difficulties of the work which they handled together, and to ask for help to be sent. In the loneliness of these Tibetan hills they found the quiet which it was impossible to secure in the town, and as they prayed in the solitudes, the answer to their prayer was nearer than they knew.

Darkness closed in early those winter days, and by the light of a little butter lamp this strange group of Christians and lamas sat and talked far into the night, and their talk was all of the things which concern the spirit of man, and of THE WAY, which is the only way of release from the crushing wheel of life.

A few weeks later that same band of men was riding out to meet the Trio who, following the beckoning Hand which led them, were brought to their very door.

The people to whom they came regarded them as messengers sent by God to meet an immediate need.

"You are the very people we prayed for," they said, "for we felt it was experienced women we needed, and experience does not go with youth. Do this one thing for us - teach us the Scriptures."

For six radiant months men and women gave

themselves unreservedly to the delights of Bible study, and from that half-year of work there emerged also a company who professed and called themselves Christians and who, on the profession of that faith, received baptism.

At last the long, happy summer drew to a close and each knew that though this place had been an Elim in the desert journey, the land they were called to possess still lay ahead. There were many talks and long discussions about that little-known area of the unevangelised North-West, and all agreed that the strategic base for forward evangelism was the big town, one week's journey ahead, which all caustically referred to as the City of Prodigals.

How quickly the human plant takes root! It was a hard wrench to leave that happy community, though but half a year had been spent among them. It is a curious clinging quality of relationship which grows up between the missionary and those to whom he stands as personified Christianity. It is lovely, it is pathetic, and it tugs at the missionary's heart-strings, but let him dare to indulge it and it develops all the horrors of parasitical life. When and how to leave is the missionary's constant problem. The babe in Christ so naturally and normally submits every problem to his trusted friend, but in its small measure the principle which



Christ confided to His disciples, holds good for His followers: "It is expedient for you that I go away." Each convert must learn to depend upon the Holy Spirit, to Whose judgment all appeal must finally be made.

The threads were cut, the tendrils snapped and the Trio travelled on to the City of Prodigals. Here was virgin soil and limitless scope for the legitimate work of the pioneer, which is to drive the ploughshare through the tangled roots of ignorance and superstition.

The time which had elapsed since leaving Hwochow until this hour, was as a whole lifetime. All through "yon huddled years" the way of life had been as a path across a plain, with little to mark the stages, then, suddenly, the road had turned and led up to a towering range through which no outlet could be seen. They had trodden the rough stones of the foot-hills and nearly lost their way among the defiles, before the narrow opening of the mountain pass had come into sight. Now they suddenly emerged and saw all that lay behind in true perspective. The clearly marked road, which close at hand had been so hard to trace, was now quite unmistakable. Ahead, too, there was a way, though they could not quite see where it led. That mattered nothing; the fiery, cloudy pillar had

guided thus far, and it was easy to rest in confidence for the future.

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A City of Prodigals it truly was. There they were sure enough, pigs and all. Some in satin gowns, some in cotton coats, some wrapped in a greasy sheep-skin, and others with no coat at all, but, rich or poor, fat or lean, the stamp of the prodigal was on them. They had reached the last town of China proper, and called a halt through sheer terror of the trackless Gobi beyond, which might devour such if they ventured farther. The prodigal has no nerve for loneliness, he prefers the crowd and the jazz of the market-place. This was a fitting sphere for three who, by such different roads, had found their way to the Father's house and had been mercifully preserved from settling down and becoming "elder brothers." It was a grand opportunity to hunt up wanderers who were still feeding pigs in distant places and it was a job after their own heart.

There was excitement in the town. The great official who was there to guard the North-West frontier from invasion, was going to celebrate his seventieth birthday with becoming lavishness, and entertain all the more stylish prodigals from every oasis under his jurisdiction. He consulted their

tastes, and prepared for them the things they most loved – riotous living and the rest. For three days there was the din of jazz, the leer of painted Jezebels, the excitement of gaming-tables, spicy foods and abundance of drink. Into the midst of it all came a band of Christian people whose arrival was exactly timed to deliver a message to the concourse of prodigals – a message direct from the Father's house. Every date had so fitted that they reached the place just in time to make up hundreds of packets of Christian literature to be distributed to each guest as the assemblies scattered. These guests were pivotal men from every oasis within a fortnight's journey, and when they travelled back to their respective towns they took with them strange books which tell wonderful things, and which always and everywhere set men thinking. All became cognisant that the One and Only God of Whom they had but vaguely heard, now commanded that men in this place, too, should repent and be saved.

In the years that followed those oases were all visited and revisited, and everywhere the preaching band met men and women who first heard of Christ at the feast, where everything had been prepared by the Governor to satisfy the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye and the pride of life, but where they

had also been summoned to the Great Feast where they might drink of the water of life freely.

The inn accommodation of the town consisted of half a dozen large courtyards, each big enough to hold twenty travelling carts. Surrounding them were rows of small rooms, with mud floors and mud *kangs* to sleep on. Light and ventilation were mainly obtained through the open door, because the window was so small, and pasted over with such dirty paper that it let in no air and very little light.

Each evening at sunset, there was a rumble and with shouts, curses and loud cries the cargo carts of the desert, each drawn by four strong mules, would lurch through the crooked doorway. With guests on the threshold, the slothful inn-keeper pushed aside his opium pipe and ran out with a false air of alacrity, to seize a broom and start sweeping up the litter which had been left in his room by the last tenant. He flicked his brush in a cloud of thick dust which his pock-marked assistant laid with a shower of sprinkled water. It was rough accommodation, but those carters had crossed the desert from Turkestan, and they had no heart to criticise an inn. The great Gobi had been overcome once more and its dangers lay behind. From whichever road caravans arrived they expected to

stay a week or two in the City of Prodigals to unlade goods and take on fresh cargo.

These were the surroundings in which the missionaries spent the first few weeks. The dirt, dust, noise, flies and vermin were unspeakable, but of all places in which to learn the intimate conditions of the expanses beyond, this was the best. Carters would sit and yarn by the hour, of Gobi, Lob, Urga, Turfan, or Kashgar - names associated with the romance of the East, but which to them were no more than Margate, or Blackpool, to the Britisher. With breathless interest the Trio learned of the great trade-route system, its distances, its resources, its dangers, its intricate, though unwritten law of the road.

Here nothing had changed since ancient days, when man had, stage by stage, conquered the waterless Gobi. The wells were older than anyone knew, and where they had been sunk the track lay.

"Where are you from, carter?"

"I hail from Kashgar."

"How long have you been on the road?"

"It is one hundred and thirty-five days since I left, and I only held up one week in Turfan and a few days when a mule went sick at Baboon Pass."

"What cargo are you carrying?"

"Raw cotton and dried fruits, but I shall sell

them here and take on wheat. Grain is expensive farther south, I hear."

"Is all quiet at the frontier?"

"You may call it quiet, if you like, but rumours are bad."

Little by little the Trio came to realise the tremendous importance of this net-work of trade-routes, by means of which the cities of Central Asia are kept in vital contact with each other. The native news-distributing system whose speed, accuracy and simplicity baffles Western understanding might surely be made a means of spreading the knowledge of the Gospel, so that men on the market-places should hear, not only the political happenings of Europe or Afghanistan, but also that "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners."

To capture these trade-routes for Him, to throw up a highway for the Lord, to make ready in the desert a pathway for God, became their ambition. With such a glorious task ahead what mattered physical discomforts, dirty inns, flies, blue-bottles, mosquitoes, bitter desert water, heat and cold, occasional shortness of food and a hard life?

They blessed God that they were not held up at this point by lack of language, or by want of knowledge of the Chinese people. In middle life, at the very time when inspiration flags and a cer-

tain dullness hangs over the horizon, the Trio were given to see God's purpose for His servants, to rise above the commonplace, mount up with wings as eagles and take the long-distance view of the plain that lies ahead, over which they must presently walk without weariness.

It is very interesting to live in an inn - rather verminous, but interesting. It has the charm of the unusual, but when there is a message for the townspeople it cannot always be delivered from an inn courtyard. In a house the Trio could receive and return calls, and enter into the life of the town, just as in the inn they could enter into the life of the trade-routes. It would seem a simple thing to hire a house, given the money with which to pay the rent, but it only sounds simple to those who do not know the difficulties. Landlords were not willing to have their houses inhabited by "devils," foreign or otherwise.

There was, however, one very nice haunted house whose ghost had already brought calamity on the family, and it was felt that if the Christians would risk it, things might be better, and certainly could be no worse. Ghosts usually choose houses which are dark, dank, mouldy and rat-infested, but in this case the scene of their pranks turned out

to be an airy summer-house, standing in a flower garden. It was quite new, for since certain strange happenings, no one had dared to live in it. The one room had a mud floor and two recesses with a mud bed in each, large paper windows and a big double-leafed door, so wide that a car might be driven through it. The Trio took this house direct from the hand of God, but with complete understanding of the terms on which they held it. As travelling Evangelists they were being provided with shelter for the winter months, but it was not to be a gin for their feet, nor a comfortable home to lure them from the hardships of the road.

Immediately things began to happen; things which were a definite indication that they were in line with the will of God. There was the wife of an artisan, whose determination to be a Christian dated from the first time she heard the Gospel. A tall Moslem woman, whose face was scarred with lines of tragic experiences also came, heard the preaching, stood up in the midst and declared: "Every word these women say is true." From that hour she became a disciple. Many men and women came to service and listened gravely, and prodigals began to come to themselves and start home.

The demands of the smallest Church can easily tie the missionary to his station, but if that came



to pass the Trio would not be fulfilling the commission which had called them across China to its bidding. They needed clear directions, and clear directions came. They saw they were to spend the winter months of each year, when road travel was almost too rigorous and caravans called a halt, at the base, and that base was the house supplied in the City of Prodigals. During those months there was to be teaching and instruction, and the remaining eight months of the year must be spent on trek, leaving the Church to take care of itself. So it came to be.

Beyond the City of Prodigals is a stretch of desert alternating with arable land watered from the Tibetan Alps. To encircle this area a month of travel was required, and it might well exercise the best wits of missionary statesmanship to plan the campaign of its evangelisation. On the material side three sources of supply were essential: money, food, Christian literature. The missionary base at Shanghai might hold a banking account, but it was another matter to find a means of transferring that money to the interior, two months' journey away. The Westerner who will go anywhere for trade, is unable to do business here, solely because of the difficulty of securing money.

It was the prodigal who came to the missionary's

help. A smiling, but shifty-looking man would walk in with a bag of silver dollars and ask a favour. "I hear that you have reliable drafts by which you can transfer money to Shanghai. Would you consider doing me the favour of transferring a few hundred dollars to a business firm?" Through the medium of a reliable guarantor the transaction was carried through, the dollars were laid on the table and the radiant and trustful prodigal went off with his cheque. Throughout all the years of pioneering, money supplies were always forthcoming in this way. They never failed.

In normal times the question of food presented no difficulty, because the people of the country were eating and living, and the missionaries had but to adapt themselves to the local menu. Wheat, millet and rice were grown locally, there was mutton of a poor quality, eggs and good vegetables. Fruit was obtainable between the months of July and October, and in the summer there was an abundance of delicious melons. Milk was an uncertain quantity which could only be obtained when a Moslem family decided to feed a cow. Sugar was an expensive luxury, butter could not be bought, and in deference to Moslem law any product of the pig was debarred.

Second to none in importance was the supply of

books, but something happened in the offices of the Bible Societies which moved them to dispatch parcels of Bibles, Testaments and Gospels, which crossed mountains, rivers and plains to reach the City of Prodigals at the very hour when they were needed.

It looked as though all that was required was the courage to step into the unknown for, whenever they did so, doors, seemingly shut, yielded to a touch. Perhaps they were marked with the word "PUSH!"

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There is one small key which unlocks the heart of every parent. It is love for children and recognition of their worth. Children abounded in the City of Prodigals. Some did the daily shopping for their mothers, others watched the stalls while their fathers were busy with customers, and many helped the family budget by hawking cooked beans, peanuts, or dried melon seeds. Others wandered about, basket on arm, collecting horse dung to heat the family bed. In summer all went well, but in winter, knots of tiny, underclad, underfed mites huddled together in a sunny corner, waiting, though they knew it not, for some disciple of Jesus Christ to come along and care for them. A Sunday service was of no use to them, even though

it took place in a tent, and was conducted on very unconventional lines. It could not be free enough to fit the mind of a child, but that question was soon settled, for if Salvation Army methods were required, Salvationists the missionaries would be, tambourines and all.

The children loved the drums, pipes and divers kinds of music with which the meeting was enlivened, and the children's service became so popular that it was held every day at sunset. All the little vendors of food snacks managed to close down business in time to be there, and the children of the wealthy crowded the seats, along with the boys and girls of the poor, with that magnificent democratic and social ease which belongs to the breeding of China's ancient civilisation. Where the children came, their parents were irresistibly attracted, and every night a picturesque crowd gathered round the open tent to watch the children and to hear the good tidings of great joy which are for all people.

Even the suspicious, ignorant, illiterate women crept out in the dusk to join the throng, and found their prejudices melting away in the cheerful atmosphere. The children's hymns and choruses became the family songs, and many living-rooms were decorated with the floral tracts which they

brought home as treasures. Before long small callers came with the message: "My mamma invites you to our house," and an eager little hand would draw the missionary down narrow alleys to the court where an excited woman was boiling a kettle for tea.

As time went on there were some children whose pitiful condition, or tragic circumstances, compelled the missionaries to care for them in a special way. The hardships of little children in that rigorous climate and comfortless land of the great North-West, is enough to stir any heart to pity, but it was unendurable to see the army of homeless, unwanted, little people who had to fend for themselves. A child craves for the protecting authority of a parent to whom it can turn as its own limited resources fail, but in the streets of all the towns there were orphans or abandoned children, who from the age of six had to be entirely responsible for themselves.

The clearest guidance was necessary as to when and how to help, otherwise the care of orphanages would become the missionary's main work. It was intolerable to think of children being frozen to death at night, but there was a large barn on the premises, the floor of which could be littered with straw, and any small boy might take shelter there for a

night, have a good bowl of porridge the next morning and carry on his begging profession for the day. There was a similar place for girls. By the time spring came these sturdy little creatures could look after themselves again.

Children undoubtedly have an instinct which leads them to those who are friends, and something, or Someone, told many a little fellow to knock at the Christian door with the simple request: "Please, teacher, take me in." The first child for whom the Trio did more was a well-grown girl of eleven, whose mother died and whose father immediately sold her off to a brutal opium smoker. The terrified child resisted. He beat her and took her clothes away, whereupon she fled naked to the fields, and hid herself in the tall sorghum. Hunger drove her out at last, a Christian woman saw her, and brought her to a farmstead where the Trio were staying.

The new code of Chinese law protects a child from being married against her will, but in order to get justice, someone has to appeal to the official. The villagers would do their part if the missionaries could arrange for the girl. This they willingly did, and in a few days, clean, tidy and dressed in a neat suit of dark blue cotton, little "Love Blossom," as they named her, mounted her donkey and rode

to school, where a Chinese Christian teacher took her in hand, taught and trained her. A happy, smiling bride, she later married a Christian youth.

When the little slave girl, now called Grace, was carried in on a man's back, she was so tortured and underfed that she looked more like a sick monkey than a child. A few days later her frost-bitten foot was amputated and gradually life and strength returned. For several years she was cared for, educated, and trained, and now she also is a happy wife.

These and many others would call themselves the Trio's children, but little Topsy stands in a special relationship to them. The first time she came to their court she was thin and emaciated. Her legs were bleeding from dog bites; she held out her hand for a morsel of bread and they saw that she was deaf and dumb. Later on they heard that her name was Gwa-Gwa - "Little Lonely!" Her mother had sold her, when a mere baby, to a woman who, furious at her bad bargain in obtaining nothing but a mute, beat the child, tortured her and turned her out to beg.

The father of "Little Lonely" was a Mongolian. Her mother lived away in the Tibetan Hills, and they met at one of those festivals when Mongol chiefs go to visit the lamaseries. The proud

Mongol rode back to his encampment, and when lovely "Little Lonely" was born, her mother only wished to get rid of her and never see her again. The child had in her blood the pride of race which could not tolerate the asking and receiving of alms. When she was turned out of doors she knew she must starve unless someone gave her bread, but, tiny though she was, she set about to pay her way, and when food was given, she performed some small service in return - such as sweeping a room, or cleaning a courtyard.

The angels must have led Gwa-Gwa to the Trio's door, for that winter was so severe that had they not fed her each day with some good warm food, she could not have sustained life. When the time came that they must leave home, the child knew instinctively that they would be away a long time, and she followed their cart mile after mile, until she could walk no further. There was always a pain in those missionaries' hearts on cold nights and when cruel winds blew, for they thought of "Little Lonely" and wondered how she fared.

A year later, when they returned, the first question was: "Where is Gwa-Gwa?"

"She has been to this gate every day to weep," was the answer.

Sure enough, at the stated time, the child



appeared, to wail out the prayer of her little breaking heart. Lifting her eyes she saw, standing in front of her, the women who loved her. With one yell of joy the little beggar-stick went into the air, and she was clasped in their arms.

It was near Christmas, and Christmas Eve is not a time at which to turn a friendless child away, so she came to stay. Dressed for the first time in clean, neat clothes, Topsy, as they called her, celebrated her Coming Day, and became a child of the house. Though dumb, she is never at a loss to make herself understood, and if she is shown a picture of the Good Shepherd, she will indicate that this is the Lord Jesus who said to her three friends: "Tell Little Lonely to come." Everyone else had always said "Go!"

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As regards the evangelisation of the Gobi oases there was everything to learn, and the main street of the town was enough to show what a problem lay ahead. Bands of Mongolians wandered about, dressed in multi-coloured garments, and wearing strange head-dresses. They were an unknown people to whom the way of approach had still to be discovered. The Tibetan the Trio knew a little better, and had already gauged something of the simplicity of the tribesman's outlook on life. The

lamas, both Mongolian and Tibetan, were a different proposition altogether, and it was only the most potent of spiritual weapons that would be effectual in finding out the joints of their armour.

A whole quarter of the town was given up to Moslem merchants, who brought the produce of Turkestan, India and Russia across the desert and exchanged it for Chinese merchandise. Pride and arrogance was stamped on every line of their haughty faces, and as the Trio walked about and took knowledge of these men and their ways, they pondered how and where to reach each of these so diverse people.

There was far greater wisdom needed than lay in them, and with a deep sense of insufficiency they asked to be taught. Seeing that the task committed to them was so vast, and time and strength so limited, it was imperative that they should not waste time on those whose hearts were like trodden ground, in which the good seed could not take root, but that they be led every time to the individuals prepared ahead for their message.

Something happened in the case of each of these peoples, to throw open a door of access. From Tibet came a lama, who, in an hour of difficulty, was helped by the Christians, and the gratitude of the chief of his monastery was such that he took

a long journey on purpose to express it, and to give the Christians a cordial invitation to his lamasery.

The Prince of the Edzingol heard tell that in the City of Prodigals women from the West had come with a declaration from the living God. Courteously, he hastened to send them a message, begging them to travel up the banks of the great river where he lived among his nomads, and tell him what they had to say. They went as soon as the treacherous river could be crossed, but when they reached his encampment the kind old chief was dead, so the word they delivered that time was for others, but not for him.

From distant Altai a great Mongolian Living Buddha, arrived on pilgrimage. Circumstances made him a guest of the Christian community, and before he left he wrote out a passport which would ensure safety for the preaching band right through his territory. "My people are wild and ignorant," he said, "and, unprotected, you would never reach my tents. Show them this paper and everywhere you will be treated as my honoured guests."

A report of these things which reached the homeland, carried an echo of hilarity which, coming under the eye of a critic, upset him very much indeed, therefore he put pen to paper and timed his

reproof well. The night it arrived the Trio were sleeping in the open, there being no room for them in the inn. It was bitterly cold weather, and to make things worse a blizzard blew up. Their supper was very hard to swallow, because it was made with bitter water from a brackish well. Then a courier came riding past carrying the mails, and handed them a packet of home letters. They read one of them, and found it was an indictment levelled at them for some supposed absence of fundamental orthodoxy.

It seemed so unbecoming that, from the comfort of his surroundings, this critic should be thinking out reproofs for those who were in the uttermost parts of the earth, calling sinners to repentance, in obedience to Christ's command. At first the dart stung, but very quickly the Trio turned it aside, remembering that this temper is peculiar to certain critical souls who, like the far-famed "elder brother" turn resentful at the sound of music and dancing. The head of their clan, nearly two thousand years ago, even dared to reprove his Father.

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Each early spring the Trio remembered the terms of their commission, and braced themselves again to the fatigues of the road. Never was the garden house so attractive as just when the trees were bursting into leaf, and every year showed them

afresh what incorrigible home birds they were. There had to be some stiff disciplining of the flesh when the living-room was being denuded of its simple comforts.

On trek all personal belongings were reduced to a minimum, as space must be left for the Christian literature without which the journey would be useless. A frying-pan, a kettle and one big pot made up the cooking outfit, along with a little iron tripod for the camp fire. Each of the three had an officer's sleeping bag with blanket and pillow, and they carried a small tent, just large enough to hold them. Everything superfluous was simply abandoned.

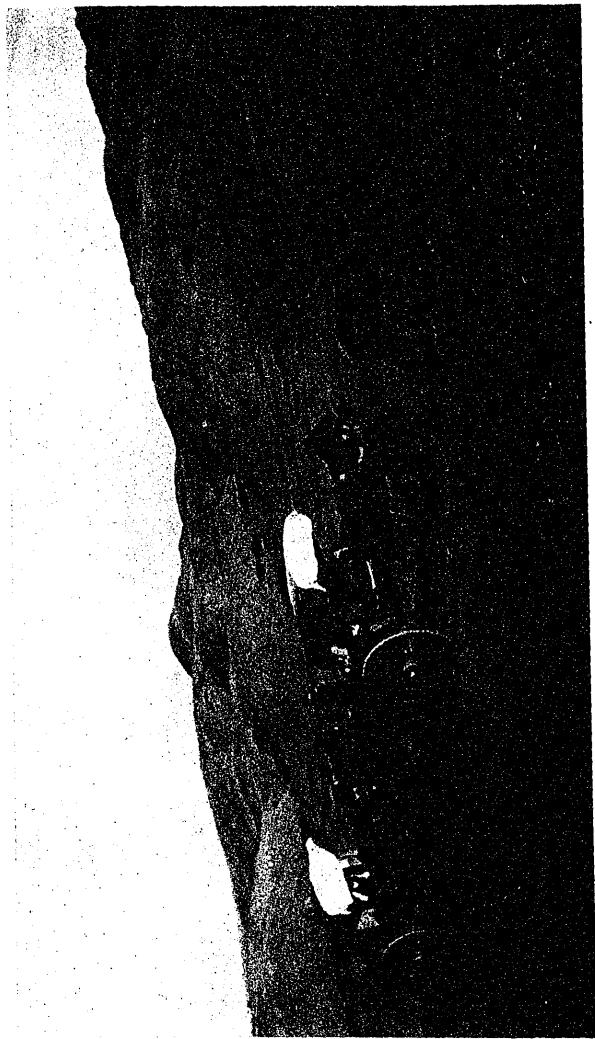
The last evening there was always "luxury tea," a kind of farewell to the soft things of home life. There would be chicken broth, and the flesh of the tough old bird minced and rolled in a pancake as thin as a sheet of paper. Then a blanc-mange made from fine lentil flour and decorated with white of egg beaten up with a little sugar and coloured with vermilion dye. It was a meal to linger over, knowing that it would be long before there would be opportunity to eat so leisurely again.

Before dawn the courtyard was buzzing and the large cauldron set on the mud cooking stove, where the home-made briquettes glowed red, for cook and carters always started on "luxury" break-

fast. One kneaded the dough, another chopped meat and vegetables to be thrown into the boiling water together with the dough-strings, and a third watched the pot and ladled out the tasty food. Then silence reigned, save for the sucking sound each man made as he crouched in his corner, consuming as many bowls of the steaming mixture as he could possibly manage. They too pictured lean days ahead, and stored up a memory of the last big fill in the happy home. The mules champed an extra ration of grain, a treat which the shrewd beasts well knew foretold extra work. Carts had been packed overnight, a business carefully and thoughtfully planned, for each article must have its appointed place, and every strap and rope must be adequate to the strain put on it.

The Christian community always gathered to bid the preachers farewell, and at the last moment the carters stood, whip in hand, while the dismissal hymn burst forth :

*“ Guide me, O Thou great Jehovah !  
Pilgrim through this barren land ;  
I am weak, but Thou art mighty,  
Hold me with Thy powerful hand :  
Bread of heaven !  
Feed me till I want no more.”*



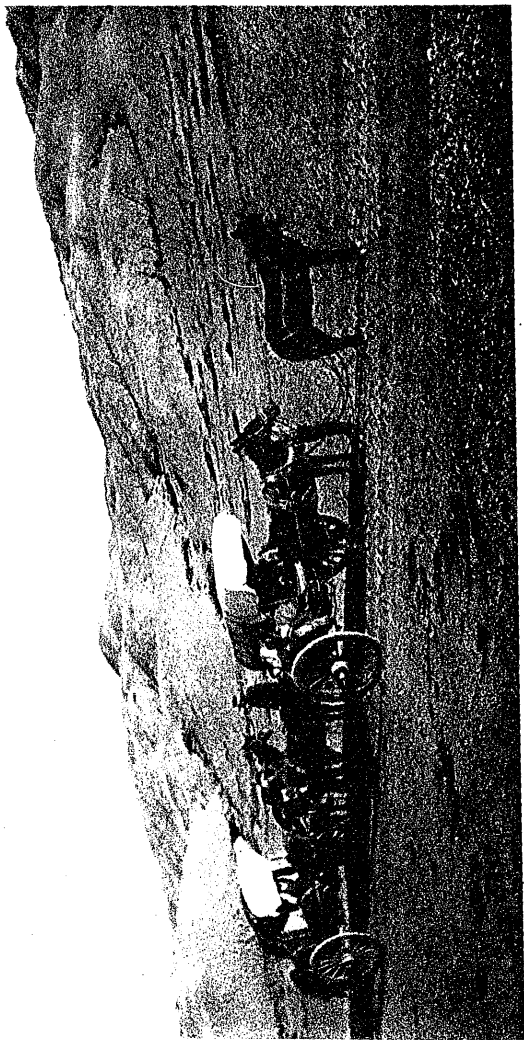
The two carts : "The Gobi Express" and "The Flying Turki"

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As the laden carts lumbered down the main street the Trio always stopped at the post office to see if a night courier had brought mails, the last they would see for many days. At the city gate the guard challenged and was pacified with a visiting card.

As the early baker hooked his hot loaves from under the smouldering straw, they emitted a smell which none of the party could resist, and a few hot loaves were added to the store. Now the town lay behind, the rushing river before, and ahead the open road once more.

. . . . .

Travel was always timed to suit the festivals and fairs of the district which were often held in strange, wild places. In the midst of one sandy plain was a hill, which stood there so unaccountably that it seemed like a great earthwork thrown up by prehistoric man and clothed upon by the vestments of the centuries. On its summit, exposed to the four winds of heaven, and absolutely unsheltered from the blazing desert sun, stood the temple, commanding an immense view of the plain. Away on the horizon the fringe of green, which is the oasis border, hid numberless farms, all of whose inhabitants attributed their prosperity and peace to the idol which lived in a dark cave where the stagnant air is always laden with the smell of stale incense.

The Trio arrived at the fair simultaneously with the theatrical troop, for the yearly worship must include the honour of a performance whose din will be grateful to the mud ears of the grotesque figure. Food vendors were already building their stoves, and spreading out their wares, and every minute some man, balancing heavy baskets across his shoulder, would emerge from the steep path and stand to mop the sweat from his brow. There were many sellers of incense and of paper money, which grown men shamefacedly burnt in the temple courts. To each shrine was allotted some priest, guardian of the gods, who tolled the bell, struck the gong, chanted the rituals and collected the gifts. In the centre of it all was the Christian tent, in the shade of which men, women and children took shelter from the burning rays of the sun. For the live-long day there was no respite for the preachers from singing, selling, talking and answering questions.

The little sleeping-tent was pitched on the ridge of the hill away from the crowds, in the strip of shade thrown by the shrine of the goddess of mercy. After nightfall there were stealthy footsteps, and evil-looking men crept like shadows to and fro. The goddess was evidently giving shelter to a small band of professional thieves who, like

the missionaries, found the crowded places good for business purposes. Possessions were few, yet for that very reason the more precious, but the Christian band need have had no fear; there is honour among thieves and not a thing of theirs was touched.

That evening, when the exacting crowds had at last scattered, and darkness had rid the tent of its last visitor and the shrine of its last worshipper, the priest walked over to sit awhile and talk.

"You have had a long, busy day, Guardian of the Temple," the preacher said.

"Yes," he replied, "and you also. I had no time until now to come and listen. You are from foreign lands? Tell me what business brings you so far?"

"We are servants of God, and have a message from Him to bid men to repent. Where is your home, Guardian?"

"I, too, am from a foreign land. My mother was a Turki woman, and I was born in Kashgar."

"What took you travelling so far from home?"

"I always like to wander on far journeys, but, as a youth, I joined the army of Wu Pei-fu. He was a great war lord and I fought many battles under him." In the dark the priest seemed to stir at the memory of warfare.

"It is a long way from a warrior's life to the calling of a priest. Tell us how it came about."

"My heart was never quiet as a soldier, so when I could get free I hastened to a temple, and there they received me and taught me to meditate, but now I always travel from shrine to shrine."

"Guardian, have you heard of Jesus?" the missionary asked.

"I did hear of Him in a Temple, where a priest, dressed as one of ourselves, told me that he believed in Jesus and that He was the Son of God," he answered.

"Guardian, you have walked so many ways of life, but there is only one Way to God, and that Way is Jesus Christ."

The moon rose and still the talk went on, and it was all of God and the approach to God. Then, without warning, and even as he was speaking, a wild whirlwind leaped from the plain and caught the cloth of the tent. For a moment all clutched the ropes, then, as the wind's force tore them irresistibly from their grip, loosed them, to cling desperately to the beddings while the canvas was lifted, whirled round and flung down at a distance. In the general confusion and darkness the priest vanished, and though in a few minutes the worst was over he did not reappear. As he travels

some desert road he will surely meet with Him Who is the Way, the Truth and the Life, for he took His records in his hand.

A year would not have sufficed to touch even the people of one area in their own homes, but the fairs were a chance for broadcast sowing, and joyously the seed was scattered. Thousands of copies of the Scriptures were bought and carried off to be read at leisure, how, where, and to what end, the preacher might never know.

Sometimes a night was spent in a farmstead within high castellated walls, whose battlements bristled with stones laboriously collected and carried there by the young men of the family in view of possible attack by bandit or rebel army. The heavy, nail-studded door was flung open and all the dogs, the fierce Tibetan mastiffs, were chained at the guests' approach, and fodder brought out for their mules. Why such hospitality? Why such kindness? Unless it be the hand of God moving people to open their homes and their hearts to the pilgrim preachers, who everywhere found a place prepared in which to pitch their tent, kind people to help, and hearts ready for the message they had been sent to deliver.

Strangers and of an alien race, they yet found themselves admitted to family confidences, and

made sharers of family sorrows. One night they were guests of a village elder, who sat down and poured out the troubles of his heart. His second and third sons could never agree and one day, in a rage, the younger threw an axe at his brother. Terrified at the sight of his gushing blood, he fled from farm to farm, till, reaching the town where a famous brigand chief was enlisting men, he joined the ranks of wild outlaws. The wounded boy lived a few weeks and then died, and the whole family was distraught with sorrow.

"I have silver put by," the father whispered, "and can buy a man to take my boy's place in the army, but how can it be managed? If I appear as a man of means they will soon send brigands down here to loot my farm. If I hire my man and take him with me they may keep us all three. His mother urges me every day to go, and my eldest son says the risk is too great and holds me back." As they talked and discussed and thought the thing round, the women folk came across the threshing floor carrying trays of steaming bread and fried vegetables to set before them. What more could these people do, when the ambassadors of Christ came to them for the first time, than to receive them with such bounty?

When the sheep were folded, the cattle fed, and



the evening meal was cleared away, the whole clan gathered together, and heard the greatest things they had ever heard in their lives – that for love of the world, God sent His Son to save sinful and rebellious humanity.

Sometimes these fortified farms seemed only to hold barricaded minds ; the white-bearded grandfather, leaning on his stick, had so accustomed his mind to the rut of avarice that, when the treasures of God were spread before him his natural reaction was : “ You can’t eat it, you can’t drink it, what’s the good of it ? ” The old woman, his wife, would scarcely turn her eyes away from the gleam of the opium lamp which, for her, had become the focus point of all that was desirable. Neither had the sons room in their lives for a religion which requires a readjustment of values, and might lead to the loss of all things for the sake of gaining the one, while to their young wives, fertility of the body meant much more than the immortality of the soul.

. . . . .

It was Easter time and spring weather had been particularly warm, but when the Trio started on a missionary journey to Mongolia, the Gobi brought up its big guns at the first halting-place and blew a

terrible blizzard with driving snow. The sleeping-tent was set up under great difficulties, and it took the genius of an old desert hand to get the dung fire burning and the pot boiling. When a hot-water bottle was filled, Evangeline, as senior, was allowed the first hug, but as it was passed to her, in the dark, she gave a piercing scream of pain, for the side of the bottle had burst and deluged her with boiling water. She was badly scalded on arm, back and leg, and the difficulty of rendering first aid in a tent swaying like a ship at sea, working in a whirl of mixed snow and manure dust, must be left to the imagination.

The forces of the air were not easily appeased, and swirling sand-storms held them up for several days. As soon as these abated they started north for Eyelash Oasis, travelling by easy stages and halting wherever there was a group of farms, the inhabitants of which would come out and listen to the preaching.

As they journeyed on they turned aside on pilgrimage to a certain lonely grave which lies beyond the Great Wall and in open desert. It is marked by nothing but a heap of stones and could never have been found but for a strange incident.

One Christmas Day a group of Chinese Christians

were talking together. One of them – a converted Moslem – began to tell of this grave :

“About three hundred years ago,” he said, “a foreigner arrived here by way of Turkestan. He was dressed as a Moslem, but the Moslems knew well that he was not one of themselves.”

Hearing these words the Trio became alert, for they knew that three hundred years ago the great Jesuit missionary, Benedict de Goës, had travelled to Kansu, disguised as a Moslem, on his way from India.

“What happened to the foreigner?” one of them asked.

“He died in this very town, and the idolaters refused to bury his body. There were all sorts of stories, and some said the corpse was so heavy that it could not be lifted.”

“Was it finally buried?”

“Yes, it was very difficult for the official. The Chinese were afraid and the Moslems were suspicious, but the mandarin said that his body must not be treated with indignity. In the end there was a compromise and the body was carried outside the Great Wall by the Moslems, for they said : ‘Though not one of ourselves yet he worshipped One God.’

“By this arrangement everyone was satisfied.

The official had done his duty, the Moslems had secured an honourable burial to the man who only worshipped One God, and the Idolaters felt safe that the foreigner's spirit would roam in Gobi and not trouble them. They call him the 'Venerable Foreigner,' and every year they still repair his grave and chant a liturgy there."

This mound of stones in a wind-swept desert was a monument more telling in its simplicity and stark nakedness than any marble tomb erected in a cathedral crypt.

At one very lonely stage the inhabitants had dwindled to one family, for the wells were dry and the only water supply was from a deep sand-pit, at the bottom of which a little brown water collected and was ladled out by the two small children. The household was at the end of its resources, and the mother was making an evening meal from a handful of bran, mixed with the scraped stem of a desert plant which is flame coloured and which, though it resembles a venomous fungus, is quite good to eat.

The name Eyelash Oasis must have been given by those who viewed it from a distance and who recognised in the long streak of blue water, bordered by swaying poplars, a likeness to lovely eyes fringed by long lashes. Just beyond is the Oasis



Lamas of the Edzingol.



of Heavenly Tints, after which are the Gates of Sand, where the traveller enters real Mongolia. Here camels were hired, great surly, reliable beasts which carry their loads so confidently over the shifting, loose, uncertain sand. The wind constantly moves the great dunes so that after each gale the road is unrecognisable.

The Mongol landmark is the *obo*, erected wherever there is a solid eminence. Viewed from a distance it has a picturesque outline, but near at hand it is a heap of sticks with bits of cotton, locks of hair, stones and coins, a veritable magpie nest. The *obo* is not only a landmark, but a shrine, at which each traveller leaves some small offering. The offering which the missionaries left was a copy of the Gospel in the Mongol language, which would certainly be appropriated by a pilgrim. The landmarks were often very difficult to detect, but the Mongolian knows where to locate them and, though very shy, he is a kindly creature, always ready to help the traveller, whose greatest danger is among the sand-dunes. When the wind blows, sand-clouds blot out the distant *obo*, but the wary native has erected a bell-tower. The wind keeps the bell constantly moving, and every caravan leader knows that he must pass that tower even if he climbs a sand-mound to reach it.

What the bell-buoy is to the mariner, the bell-tower is to the desert caravan.

The banks of the Edzingol are covered with the desert poplar, whose beauty of shape and colour makes of the place a veritable enchanted forest. The overhanging branches, flowers and undergrowth of summer are only surpassed in beauty by the golden tints of autumn and the flaming, feathery growth of the huge tamarisk bushes. Back among the tree-trunks, and hidden by rough barricades of woven branches, are lonely Mongolian tents. They are made of felt, with a circular hole in the roof, and a doorway covered by a very heavy *portière*. Inside they are warm and comfortable, and the ground is spread with felt-mats. Firewood being very abundant, there is always a bright blaze in the centre, and smoke curls out through the hole in the roof.

Three weeks of hard travel brought the Trio to the prince's pastures, where his flocks of sheep and herds of ponies, camels and bullocks grazed at pleasure. Rangers galloped over the plain, singing wild songs and rounding up the herds.

Near grass, wood and water, but at a respectful distance from the royal enclosure, the missionaries pitched their camp, and immediately sent off a present to the prince who, it was reported, was



very much pleased with it, and signified the same by shooting upwards his two royal thumbs in sign of approval. The offering took the form of some good things to eat and some good things to read, and next day, when they presented themselves in the prince's audience tent, the books they had sent him were laid by his side.

The tent was a very large one, and on the dais, in the chief place, sat the prince. He wore a coat of green brocade with a scarlet collar and high leather boots stitched with many colours and turned up at the toes. At the lower end of the tent the interpreter, a Mongol-speaking Manchu, knelt before his master. The members of the Christian party sat in a row at the prince's right hand, and to his left were various members of the household. He shouted an order and servants brought in parched corn in beautifully lacquered boxes, one of which was served to each guest with a cup of tea, into which they stirred the pleasant-tasting meal. For a long time they sat and discussed many things – the customs of foreign lands, their governments, the missionaries' relation to those governments, till, gradually, the talk concentrated on the great matters which had brought them there.

Immediately at his left hand sat a tall, grey-

headed Living Buddha. He was a travelled man, and had heard tell of one named Jesus.

"I know about these three women," he said to the prince. "They are unmarried and travel everywhere, teaching their religion and doing good deeds."

"Excellent, excellent," said the prince, turning to the missionaries. "When did you leave Russia? What! not Russia? England, did you say? Where is that?"

"Their country lies beyond Hindustan," explained the Living Buddha.

"The books you sent me are very good," said the prince. "I am told they are the same as those read in Moscow. You have only one stage from here to the Russian border; there you will find plenty of people to follow your religion."

"We have nothing to do with Moscow, and we should not be allowed to cross that border," was the missionaries' answer.

At this point the prince shouted a peremptory order, and immediately a man in lama dress lifted the curtain and came in.

"What is this; you told me these books came from Moscow!" the prince fiercely demanded.

"So they do," answered the lama, "and they all

teach Communism. A very good doctrine too. No rich, no poor, and plenty for everybody."

In this difficult atmosphere the preachers endeavoured to present the great claim of Christ, and the prince nodded his warrior head in approbation, while the grey-haired Living Buddha listened intently and the interpreter did his best to convey clearly the things which the missionaries were saying.

Throughout the talk the prince's lama counsellor sneered openly at the call to repentance and the offer of salvation, trying to turn the chief aside from even the consideration of that faith.

Hours went by and as evening drew on the Trio left the prince, still in a bewildered frame of mind, confused by the two great suggestions which had that day been presented simultaneously to his simple understanding. The one was the strange statement from the propagandist at his ear: "There is no God"; the other was contained in the Scriptures he held in his hand - a message from God Himself offering release from the domination of sin and the power of Satan.

A few days later they stood in the tent of a spiritual ruler of the Edzingol. The old, old man sat cross-legged on the throne of the nomad temple. He wore lacquer-like garments and a

pointed yellow cap. The skin of his face was like parchment which has been browned by centuries of use. From his skinny fingers hung the rosary, of which his thumb shakily counted the beads. His trembling lips murmured the perpetual refrain of lama contemplation: "*O mane padme hum!*" (Oh, thou precious jewel in the lotus!). Before him were spread out the insignia of his ecclesiastical office - a bell, a drum, a bunch of peacock's feathers, a rattle and a thunderbolt. Among these pitiful toys he sat immobile as an idol, save for the tremble of finger and jaw as he offered his ceaseless and meaningless mumble of prayer. At the entrance of the missionaries not so much as a gleam of curiosity broke through the fog of his dull mind.

This man, though living in Mongolia, was a Tibetan, and a few weeks later the Trio were among the lamaseries of his native land, which train such men as he to such an end as his.

In the glory of the Tibetan valley the fields were blue with iris, the pine forests were carpeted with flame-coloured orchids. Blue gentian, white edelweiss and every kind of Alpine flower was strewn in profusion. The shy marmot played among the hills and shaggy yaks browsed in the pastures, while overhead the great white-headed eagle hovered, seeking its prey.

It was the summer festival, and the mountain-side was gay with bands of tribesmen dressed in the brightest colours. The women wore tall yellow hats jauntily trimmed with a fox brush thrown round the brim, under which appeared long plaits studded with turquoise, jade and shell ornaments. They galloped fearlessly down the hill-side, then leapt from the saddle and let their horses loose for pasture.

In the midst of all this free beauty stood the dark lamasery with high walls and gilded roof, built so as to exclude God's glorious sunlight. Inside the temple court, robed in yellow satin, a Living Buddha sat to receive the homage and the presents of his people. In the central hall gloom prevailed, but the altar was bright with dozens of small butter lamps placed before the image of the Buddha. All around were heavy, embroidered curtains and the pillars were swathed in silk. On either side of the altar were tables laden with old manuscript liturgies, chief treasures of the monastery. The school of little lamas sat in a double row on the ground, swaying to the rhythm of their own monotonous chant. Their teacher, raised above them, periodically struck a gong, rang a bell or sprinkled holy water with a bunch of peacock's feathers.

At midday the dance began with a procession of

grotesque, repulsive and suggestive figures who stepped, bowed, swayed and leapt to the measure marked by the cymbals and horns of the musicians. For hours the mummary proceeded, sometimes quaint and queer, often reminiscent of things so old, and so evil, as to have been mercifully forgotten by the nations to whom the word "god" does not mean "devil." The entire performance presented an unabashed ritual of evil the only logical issue of which was a night of orgy, for the satanic merriment had not run its course until all the senses of the worshippers were steeped in the oblivion of satisfied lust.

These are strange surroundings for an embassy from Christ, and nothing would take the ambassador there except the knowledge that the lamasery festival is the only occasion when he can reach the Tibetan with the word of life. The illusive tribesman moves his tent so frequently, and guards it so jealously, as to make himself practically inaccessible. To the devil-dancing everyone comes, and there everyone can be approached - man, woman and child.

The missionary must learn how to stand her ground, how to use her weapons, how to meet an attack, and how to conduct an offensive, fighting decisively and not as one who beats the air. She

is there as a witness to the fact of God, to the triumph of the Cross, and to the power of the Resurrection, and hers is the solitary protesting voice.

It is not to be imagined that she stands unchallenged.

"The kingdoms of this world are mine, and I give them to whomsoever I will," boasts the arrogant demon.

"The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ," the missionary answers, singing it aloud for the strengthening of her own faith; and even as she sings it she sees right through the illusion which has captured these people by fear, and retains them with bribery, giving them all they best love – feasting, drinking and lewdness, things so compatible with the worship of Satan.

On the missionary herself there inevitably falls an overpowering sense of helplessness in face of such a display of evil, the very intention of which is to convince her that she is engaged on a hopeless task. "There is nothing to be done for a people so degraded; this is not the place to look for converts. Go to some easier field. You will have nothing to show for your work here."

But it is not the first time that she has observed

the phenomena of light and darkness, and she knows that the opening of a window floods a pitch-dark cell much more easily than it illumines a dimly-lighted cathedral.

She is there to open a window, and Jesus said:  
“I am the Light.”



PART SIX

AMONG THE PILGRIMS

“ Speak but the word ! the Evangel shall awaken  
Life in the lost, the hero in the slave.”

## AMONG THE PILGRIMS

**I**N spite of racial differences and diversity of national background, the Trio find Central Asian contacts easier than those of the West. Perhaps they have lived too much out of England, but in the West they find themselves craving for the natural, spontaneous approach, which is so easy in a land of spaces, where life has not yet speeded up to the exclusion of roadside intercourse. It does not seem strange to any Central Asian wayfarer that someone should have travelled thousands of miles on purpose to talk with him about things of the spirit, and why should it? He knows that men travel far to sell their goods, and to trade in pelts, all of which things are obviously so much less important. The merchant knows how to seek contacts which lead to business ; but the preacher is dependent on Divine guidance for the contacts which are going to release those whom Satan hath bound, and apart from that guidance he will waste his time. The directions must be explicit and every step must be ordered, otherwise preacher and hearer will miss one another.

The pilgrim had come from the other end of

China, and the Trio had pitched their tent on the threshing floor, where the crowds could conveniently gather for the preaching, but the travelling lama knew nothing about this. He was tired with the day's march, and sat behind a wall, looking round for the sign of a temple where he might spend the night. They were constrained to leave the threshing floor for a short walk, and there they found him :

“Lama, you look tired. Have you come far?”

“I have walked for eight months to get here,” he said.

“And where do you come from?”

“I have come from the East seeking the land where the sun sets, and where God is.”

By this time they were sitting together on the crumbling earth-mound, behind which rose the high city wall golden in the rays of the setting sun. The turret guard-house was silhouetted against the light blue sky, and the sentry leaned over the battlement and looked down upon them.

“If it be God that you are seeking, why go to the land of the setting sun?”

“Because they say that He dwells there.”

“Lama, God is not far from any one of us.”

And so how naturally did they preach unto him Jesus.



“Pilgrim, what do you seek?”

“I seek the remission of my sins.”



It could not be by chance that they made contacts with so many pilgrims. There was one morning, when out much earlier than usual from the inn courtyard, they passed a spring and heard the sound of a Tibetan prayer coming from under the rock where the little crystal pool lay. They looked down and met the eyes of a Tibetan who, as he lifted each cup of water, murmured a blessing. He was so much surprised to see Western women in Chinese dress watching him, that the words of blessing died on his lips.

“Who are you, and from what land have you come?” was his question.

“Lama, we have come half across the earth with a message from God to you.”

With the deepest solemnity he listened to the story, followed them home, and, as the Tibetan copy of Mark's Gospel was put in his hands, bent his head until his forehead rested on the sacred volume. Later, they met him in another town and he came daily to hear more, but when a brigand army surrounded the place he fled for his life to the Tibetan mountains, taking that Gospel with him.

On the high roads of the North-West are pilgrims who visit all the most sacred shrines of the country, prostrating themselves in the dust as they go.

“Venerable traveller, how long is it since you started on pilgrimage?” the Trio will ask.

“I have wandered for five years,” the answer may be.

“And what do you seek?”

“I seek the remission of my sins.”

“Have you found the remission of your sins?”

“I don’t know; when I am dead I shall know.”

How often does this terrible answer come from the lips of the women who are working out life-long vows of abstinence and asceticism. Every day at dawn they are burning incense before the idols of the family shrine, and every night the sound of tinkling bells can be heard, while the smoke of incense rises. Their food is rice, unflavoured by any of the condiments which make it palatable, and life for them is one long, rigorous self-denial. To the question: “Why such hardness?” the answer always is: “That I may obtain the remission of sins,” and to the further question: “Is your sin remitted?” “I do not know; when I am dead I shall know.”

What are these sins which send men and women on such strenuous quests? They are not troubled concerning the root principle of sin, which separates man from God, but merely by its fruits, those deeds



which every man's conscience condemns and which steal from him his peace of mind.

These gentle women will lead one to the Courts of Hell in the Buddhist Temple, where the tortures which await the soul are so realistically portrayed. There the judge presides, scales in hand, and with cold, relentless justice pronounces judgment and hands over the shrinking soul to his minions. Here it meets the retribution for lust, lying, cruelty and murder. On and on it passes from torture to torture, through those dread precincts till at last it emerges, ready for a new incarnation which will be on a higher or lower scale according to deserts.

"Do you see that bridge, teacher?" pointing to a narrow plank on which little figures stand looking from the giddy height into the torture pool of blood below. "If I deny myself enough and hold all desire in check, I shall pass safely over the plank when my turn comes, and escape the tortures of that court."

"I would walk from here to Lhasa," exclaimed a tall, powerful soldier when he had talked with the Christian missionaries of sin, righteousness and judgment, "if by that means I could wash from these hands the stain of the blood which they have shed." If they had dared to meet that man with

any demand, however severe, upon his own resources, no sacrifice would have been too great, no effort too exacting, no price too heavy, with which to buy his own salvation.

The stern exclusiveness of the Christian claim is a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence, to the all-embracing pantheism of the disciple of Buddha, and the declaration: "There is none other Name given among men whereby we must be saved" is a hard word for those who have laboured strenuously to prepare a path for their own feet, which should lead them to Paradise.

Just behind the Courts of Hell is the priest's living-room, and there is the grinding stone where his wheat is ground to flour. Each early morning a little donkey is led out by the small acolyte, who carefully blindfolds and harnesses it to the pole by which the heavy stone is turned. All through the day it treads the circle of its restricted path, sometimes slowly, sometimes quickly, sometimes goaded by a whip, sometimes hurried by a flying stone. When evening comes it is unhitched, the blinder removed and now, in spite of the efforts, the fatigues and the sweat of the day, the ass is still at the identical place from which it started.

A good enough trick wherewith to cheat work out of a donkey, but what of the men who even

so tread out life's journey, some more quickly, some more slowly, some trying to accomplish a great deal, others letting life slip by? To their captor it matters little how they spend the hours, so long as they never leave the circle. Only they must be blindfolded, lest they catch sight of the Door which is the Way of escape from the earth-bound circle and the entrance to the straight Road which leads to God. The god of this world hath blinded their minds.

The evangelist, entrusted with the message of reconciliation, would be utterly baffled, were it not that the spirit of man is the candle of the Lord. When he indicates the Way of release, and points out the Path of Life, the spirit of man knows. His head may forget, his soul be atrophied, submerged or practically non-existent, but the spirit knows, and the preacher stakes his all on that.

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The land introduces one but gradually to its desert terrors. Otherwise one might not be able to bear them. First, there came an unexpected stretch of sand-hills through which it seemed impossible to drag the reluctant cartwheels, but the driver made little of it. "The oasis lies behind that further dune—a stiff pull, but it's only a mile after all." Sure enough, as suddenly as it appeared, the sand tract stopped and green fields

lay beyond, but you have had your first taste of the desolating wilderness the encroaching greed of which is always trying to win back the land, which the ancient oasis maker tore from its grasp.

When the ravening waste next lies across your path the driver speaks differently : " The next stage is a hard one. It will be as much as the carts can manage - loose grit for ten miles, then the road hardens, but all the thirty miles there is no water and therefore no rest. We will make a night journey of it." This is a new experience, and with interest one begins to learn the lore of night travel. " We shall start one hour before sunset," is the carters' dictum, and by that time everything is ready. Men and beasts are fortified with as large a meal as they can manage, each man's water gourd is filled, the carts are packed and roped with special care, and the party makes a cheerful start.

Immediately after sunset an ominous chill spreads through the dry air, and by dark each one, even on a summer night, has put on his warmest covering. The stars swing round the firmament, and soon the moon is up. Silence settles on the whole party, but no sleep, for the Gobi has taken you in hand and commands your attention. The mules know that their business is to step out and endure the inevitable fatigue and thirst. The carters, dumb

as their teams, tramp in the starlight with sure feet. The traveller, if his line of communication with God be open, sits in a rapt sense of the Divine which checks the instinct of self-expression and commands the tense silence of utmost reverence. This is the hour when the quiet spirit takes control of the self-expressive soul. Time passes, the moon sets, the morning star rises, then the first streak of dawn shows in the east and with a burst the sun is up. "We are there," shouts the carter, and behold, a clump of trees, a wide enclosure with spacious stable sheds and a long, low mud building with a dozen rough doors, each of which opens into a small room. Then suddenly the realisation of fatigue grips one; there is no desire for food, only for a drink and then for the mud bed on which to lay one's aching body and sink into the deep sleep of utter exhaustion.

After one such journey the desert has caught you. If you will, you, the so-called teacher of men, shall be taught yourself things which are never learnt in the hurry, the bustle, the crowd, and the jazz of twentieth century life. It shows you first the value of widened horizons and at last the streets, the houses, and all the man-made erections, come into right proportion, and, strange to relate, they never look so imposing again.

In its fierce, torrid middays the desert teaches you how to distinguish the real from the illusion. Always, seemingly near at hand, but just out of reach, is the lapping water of the mirage lake. It tempts you out of the way to quench your intolerable thirst at its brink, but it is only to find yourself on a mad quest, chasing the unreal.

"See, there is water!" the inexperienced traveller calls out.

"Water," says the old desert hand, "sand water!" Then he adds: "In the desert never believe in water until you taste it."

Still more dangerously deceptive are the weird sounds, the call for help to which it seems inhuman not to respond but too many have been lost that way, and your guide is adamant: "That's not the call of a man. Whoever answers that will be lured to his death." Those strange voices always call one aside from the right road; but who can say what *is* the right road over such a trackless plain? It is a far more imperative line than any other path men follow, for it leads direct from well to well, and water is life. The tracks are so ancient that even when the blizzard crashes down and carries mountains of sand from one place to another, the road is only temporarily smothered, and in a short time it will unobtrusively reappear. By that old road

which cannot be finally obliterated the spirit of the desert teaches the fundamental laws of moral rectitude. The dust of a lawless generation may blow across, and the old rut may vanish, but wait a while and it surely reappears, for its foundation is more enduring than any of the storms.

One of the strange sights of the desert is the whirling dust spout. On the calmest day, often in couples, they come pirouetting across the plain.

"See the pair of them, male and female," shouts the old leader.

"Has sand a sex also?" asks the traveller.

"There is more than sand in that! Those are the desert *gwei*.\* You can tell male from female by the way they wrap the dust around them."

The shrewd old fellow talked on about the spirits which shelter in the wilderness, always inimical to man and anxious to turn him from his straight course, whether by the snare of an illusion or by the ascendancy of fear.

"What they want is a body, and for lack of a better one they pick up a shroud of sand," he went on. "There is many a bleaching skeleton among those sand-dunes for which they are responsible." Some things he said were amazingly scriptural. "When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man he

\* *Gwei*.—Spirits of the dead.

walketh through dry places, seeking rest; and finding none . . .” The travellers listened, thought and pondered their own ignorance, while the Gobi warned them: “Hold your curiosity in check. There is no need for you to explore every avenue of questionable knowledge. In this trackless waste, where every restriction is removed and where you are beckoned and lured in all directions, your safety is in austerity and in deliberately accepted limitations. One narrow way is the only road for you. In the great and terrible wilderness push on with eyes blinded to the deluding mirage, your ears deaf to the call of the seducer, and your mind undiverted from the goal.”

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Like so many of China's internal commotions, it all began over a bowl of food. For more than two thousand years the fifth day of the fifth moon has been marked out for feasting, and it was a daring official of the City of Prodigals who declared in 1929 that his budget did not permit of extra rations for the soldiers on that day. “What!” they yelled. “No meat, no wine, no pork dainties!” Late the evening before there was an ominous look about the barrack-yard, which the officer would have noticed if he had not been too busy entertaining some gay ladies with wine and mah-jong. As soon as



the merry-makers had inhaled their opium the signal was given, and the half-doped, wine-besotted officers were startled by a rifle-shot which was the signal for firing from each of the city gates. The mutineers rushed the gaol, released the prisoners and distributed rifles to every likely man. Caught like rats in a drain the officials fled in all directions, hiding among the refuse heaps, and even crawling through the city wall by the gutters which carried waste water to the moat.

Meanwhile the soldiers were having the time of their lives. Their own self-appointed leaders marshalled the men and gave them liberty to loot the shops and take all they wanted. Every officer's house was bursting with cooked food ready for the feast, but this time it was the private soldiers who ate it all. They tore the roast birds apart with their hands and, still gnawing the succulent flesh, rushed on to the shops and banks where there was money. In a few hours the streets were littered with copper coins, which the looters flung aside as they took the silver dollars. Each man fitted himself out with shoes, a new hat, a wash-hand basin and some riding-kit. The next thing was to secure horses enough to enable them to get away before word of the mutiny reached the neighbouring towns. Cutting the telegraph wires

gave them forty-eight hours' start, and when each man had commandeered his mount, they all cantered off with a parting volley in lieu of good-bye.

Mutiny spreads in a discontented army as quickly as measles in the nursery, and very soon the whole area was in a blaze. This was the beginning of the era of brigand armies in China's great North-West. From this time on, the populace knew no security, and the Rebel Army gathered into its ranks all prodigals who were at a loose end. The men had to be fed, and the only way to feed them was to levy supplies of grain and grass from the farmers, and money from the business men. The simplest way was to begin by establishing a reputation for ferocity, after which demands, however exacting, were instantly met. A few executions, some severe beatings, a little incendiarism, soon had the desired effect, and the money was levied upon the town on pretext of "taxes paid in advance," for which an official receipt was issued. Before long the taxes had been paid for fifteen years ahead.

It needed very clear guidance to know when to remain in the city, and when to take to the road. There are times in brigand occupation, when, if the missionary be caught in the town, all he can do is to keep within his four walls, whereas, if he

be in the country, he can carry on unhindered. As soon as possible the Trio were off, but in avoiding engagements between government troops and irregulars they were twice nearly caught by Moslem marauders, who were hiding in the fissures of the Tibetan foothills.

There is a certain cold horror which creeps over one when the dreaded words "Moslem Troops" are heard. There is something so blood-curdling about their very aspect. Tall, powerful, bearded, with bold, cruel, relentless eyes, they have a daring which paralyses the Chinese. Such men always manage to be well armed, and if short of ammunition, a sharp dagger will serve their purpose. Their speech is guttural, and interspersed with words of Arabic. Their heads are swathed in a black turban and when the order to kill has been issued, they unhesitatingly go through a city slaying every man in its streets. It was such bandits who held the fastnesses of the Tibetan hills and they were in a desperate case for want of food. No one could exactly locate them, but all believed them to be some days' journey from the peaceful oasis of "Clear Gold" where the missionaries were preaching at a large fair. When the crowds had scattered there were visits among the farms and the pleasures of quiet sociability.

In the afternoon, as they left one house, an excited man ran towards them asking if they had field-glasses with them. "Direct them on to those three black stones," he exclaimed. "Now watch very carefully, do their shadows move as though someone were hiding there?" The Trio could see nothing unusual, but his eagle eyes were more to be relied on than the field-glasses, and in a few minutes the village women were hiding their treasures and the young men collecting stones for possible defence. If the missionary once let himself consider fear he would spend his life in a panic, and the words of the evening prayer were very steadying: "Lighten our darkness, we beseech Thee, O Lord, and by Thy great mercy defend us from all perils and dangers of this night."

All were very tired after strenuous working days, and quickly fell asleep, but scarcely an hour later there was a rifle-shot and all the temple bells rang out a wild alarm. Then the thud of a galloping horse whose rider shouted as he went: "Flee! Flee! The Moslem brigands are upon us! They are looting the farms and riding in this direction." The tired beasts were dragged from their feed and in an incredibly short time tents were rolled up and the camp ready to move. No one knew which way to turn, but just then a man emerged from the dark-

ness: "Teachers," he said, "your only safety is to make for the main desert road and get to the town of Jade Gate. I have come to lead you, for you could never find the bridges in the dark without a good guide."

At last, after seventeen hours of continuous travel, the light turret of Jade Gate stood out against the afternoon sky. The mules had no pull left in them and the carters' eyes were bloodshot with the effort of driving and walking. All were dizzy with exhaustion and wanted no food, but only sleep. Next day there were rumours that the Moslems were moving on towards Jade Gate, and the only way to avoid them was to push ahead a stage further to a small market town. Here the mandarin was in hiding, but sent a private message asking the missionaries to go to him. They found him in a dark room at the back of a shabby shop, and they had to scramble over the counter to get to him. He was a tall, fine-looking, capable man who had been educated in Tientsin, at a Western college. His own troops had joined the mutineers, looted the arsenal and left him helpless and alone, but for one trusty man.

"I hear you met the Moslem bands from the Tibetan hills," he said.

"We barely escaped them," they replied.

"I am sorry to say they may be here to-day, and the mutineers are approaching from the opposite side, so we are caught between the two. You ladies read Chinese. Look at this dispatch!" He handed over a paper which told of a large force moving rapidly in that direction. "I can do nothing to help you, but I warn you not to go forward towards the west, for the mutineers are coming that way, and you must not go back, for the other road is cut off. My own plan is to flee into the villages. It will be very difficult for you to do so, but there is nothing else that I can advise you." Then he said: "I wish I could do something for you, but my own life is in danger. Please pray for me."

Half an hour later the vanguard of that army rode through the town and straight into the inn. An immediate decision had to be made, as the Trio were required to evacuate their rooms for the oncoming soldiers. These particular men were merely commanded to prepare quarters, arrest the mandarin, ride on to Jade Gate and do the same there. The advice to move into the villages was impossible to follow, for it was out of the question to be wandering about in the dusk, in a strange locality, looking for shelter in a brigand-infested area.

In such a dilemma, immediate and definite guid-

ance was imperative, and while one stayed with the goods two slipped out of the inn-court to a shady spot to be quiet and pray that God would deliver, and send a guide to take them on their way. Nothing could seem more unlikely at the moment than the granting of that petition, for the little town was already deserted, and the farmers were in a panic. Yet, again something happened, for within ten minutes a man rode up the inn-court on a little donkey wearing a small brass crucifix stitched to his coat. Seeing the three women he stood transfixed and they, equally amazed, stared also, each wondering how the other had come to this place.

"Who are you? Where do you come from? Why do you wear the Christian badge?" they asked.

"I am a farmer," he answered, "away on the Gobi border, and why do I wear a crucifix? Because I belong to a Catholic family down south. But what are *you* doing here?" he continued.

"Do you realise that you are in great danger?"

When the situation was explained he immediately said: "I can help you, and I will do so; meet me at dusk at the back of the old Temple, trust yourselves to me and I will take you to where you will be safe."

By the light of the rising moon he led the party through a labyrinth of oasis lanes, which are so

difficult to negotiate because of the intersecting water canals. Soon there was sharp firing in the distance and it did not seem safe to proceed, so it was decided to stay still till dawn. In the quiet of the earliest morning he led on to where there was a group of small farms with nothing beyond but barren Gobi. Here was safe shelter and simple people, who, but for this incident, would never have heard the message of Christ.

Two weeks later, the man with the crucifix led the party out by a circuitous route from farm to farm, until they were on the main road for Turkestan. Only once did they meet a band of brigands. It was after leaving an inn where they had rested and met a former acquaintance from the City of Prodigals, a man who, like themselves, had been caught on the road. He was intensely nervous, but as they drove away he called out : " We shall meet again this evening." Half an hour later the Christian caravan was held up by soldiery and only escaped robbery because, at the crucial moment, an officer rode up, recognised them and shouted : " Let those people pass, they are our missionaries." He then saluted and rode away, but stopping at the inn, his men seized the traveller from the City of Prodigals, stood him against the wall and shot him.

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At the close of a long missionary journey in Turkestan, hot weather overtook the Trio in the town of Cumul, which is as bad a place as could be found in which to spend a summer. What between glaring sun, whirling dust, loathsome flies and tormenting mosquitoes, life in an inn became almost intolerable. Moreover they longed for rest from the crowds which never failed to gather wherever they appeared, and from the endless callers who made it impossible even to secure a quiet meal.

Before the inn door was open in the morning someone was shouting that there was a sick woman outside, and even if the door-keeper refused to open till sunrise, sleep was gone, for the man continued knocking. By five o'clock he had gained admission, glued his eye to a small hole in the missionary's paper window and from that time on there was no respite. When, at last, the cook was commanded in a determined voice to bring breakfast, some special case, from a long way off, would sit watching for the last mouthful of food to be swallowed. So it continued all day long, and if the Trio escaped from the inn, they were pressed into a variety of homes by those who wanted to see and hear them.

The owner of the *caravanserai* was a kind host

and realised how much they were needing a holiday. He was, moreover, anxious to do all he could for them. A few weeks earlier his mother lay at death's door. All hope of her recovery was abandoned, but when the missionaries arrived in Cumul, he begged them to help. The old Moslem lady would not consent to see any man doctor, in fact, would rather lose her life than do so. She knew and loved the Trio, and when she heard of their arrival, she thanked Allah and took courage. For several days still her life hung in the balance, but prayer was made for her in the name of Messiah Jesus and she recovered. The amazement of the family, rejoicing of relatives, and congratulations of friends spread the news throughout the whole area.

Her son considered that it was now time for the healers of others to have a little consideration shown to them.

"Our Cumul heat is more than you can stand," he began. "Why not go into the country for a while?"

"We cannot find a cool place nearer than Barkul, and that is four days' hard travel over mountains," was the only answer the Trio could give.

"I think I could get you an invitation to the Khan's summer palace, in a lovely oasis thirty miles from here. The Prime Minister is an old friend of

mine – we were at school together. If you like I will see him to-day and arrange it.”

Next day the Prime Minister himself called on the Trio.

“You have saved the life of my friend’s mother,” he said. “We are sworn brothers, and his mother is as my mother. My debt to you is equal to his. If you would like to take a holiday at the summer palace, which is standing empty, the place is at your disposal.”

A few hours later a burly Turki stood in the doorway, saluted, and declared himself ready to receive orders from the Khan’s guests :

“I am here to take you to the summer palace, serve you while there, and bring you back whenever you wish to come. Command me.”

The old Khan was very sick, but he took pen and paper and wrote out a proclamation to his people in the hills, which ordered that his guests should be received with every honour and supplied with all that they required.

At the summer palace rooms were ready and a lady-in-waiting in attendance. The inner and most secluded apartment had been selected, where servants could sleep within earshot and be in attendance all day. The lady-in-waiting knew her work; it was to sleep with her charges and ply

them with luscious fruits and salted tea at frequent intervals. It was a splendid arrangement from everyone's point of view, excepting that of the weary guests, who only craved air, space, quiet, solitude and, above all, liberty. If these were not to be secured, Cumul with its flies was preferable to such surveillance.

The Trio wandered off among the gardens. Away from that gilded cage it was all so restful, and when they saw the shady pagoda trees and running waters they decided on a bid for liberty.

"Your care of us has exceeded our deserts," they said to their hosts, "but in the garden yonder is a large tree under which we can put up our tent, and its shade is all that we require."

There were many protests, but in the end the Trio had their way. The equerry was not sorry to take possession of the vacated room, and the poor lady-in-waiting, overcome by fatigue, complained of severe headache. In this the Trio saw an opportunity of descending to the rank of commoners again. A dose of aspirin, in tabloid form, was administered, with strict orders to go home and rest for twenty-four hours. That disposed of the lady-in-waiting, and she gave no more trouble. The equerry was soon asleep on the rugs

prepared for the guests, and the Trio were left in peace to roam at will.

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There was peace and quiet among the enchanted glades and rushing watercourses, and the only people about were the gardeners and their families. Each morning the women brought presents of bread, eggs and fruit, and each evening the young girls fetched out their tambourines and danced together in the green glades. In such Arcadian peace the mind was released from all thought of brigandage, banditry, murder and carnage; yet without warning brigands appeared again.

The Trio returned from an evening ramble to find the robbers there – armed, fierce and very angry to see a tent pitched in the garden. “Whose tent is that?” “How many people are here?” “Are they armed?” “Where are they?” These were the questions they thundered at the old gate-keeper. The leader turning fiercely, saw the inoffensive party and burst into a loud laugh. “Why, it’s our missionaries again; we seem to meet them everywhere.” It was the same Colonel who had searched their carts by the roadside a year before and who had shot the man in the inn. This time he was gun-running and laying up stocks of ammunition in a mountain fortress, in preparation for the revolution

which broke out a few months later, and is still shaking Central Asia to its foundation.

The overladen camels were almost spent with the weight of their burden, and the Colonel's bold eye searched the stables for mules which he might "borrow," but they were not there to borrow, for owing to a difficulty about fodder, they had gone back to town to be fed up for the long journey ahead. The brigand was disappointed to find the stables empty, so set about to feed his camels on wheaten flour to strengthen them for the one last stage, after which they might lie down and die.

With becoming hospitality the old cook dipped into the party's limited supplies to feed the robber band, while the Trio sat and listened with tactful interest to the Colonel's romances.

"The Nanking Government has now placed this whole area in my care," he boasted.

"Indeed," said Eva French politely.

"I am patrolling the desert in search of robber bands."

"That is a dangerous job," said Mildred Cable.

"It is a secret mission and we are avoiding the large towns."

"You will be quiet enough here," said Francesca.

At this point bowls of steaming dough-strings appeared, and the old cook, whose shaking knees

were fortunately concealed by his thick white apron, handed them round to the Colonel and his followers, saying: "There is neither meat nor condiments to be bought in this place, so your Honour must excuse such a poor meal!"

"Fine! Fine!" said the Colonel, his face wreathed with smiles at the sight of the best bowl of food he had seen for many a long day.

The bandits scarcely slept, and all night they sat round the camp-fire, the reflection of which gleamed in their polished guns. No position could have been more unprotected than that of the women who lay watching them from under the flap of their sleeping-tent. If it had suited the Colonel's strategy to hold a few hostages, it might have been weeks before their position was even known, but they were conscious of the wall of fire which encircled them. After a while they slept, and the angels took charge.

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One week later, at midnight, the Trio heard a great cry: "The Khan is dead," and a messenger who brought the news galloped up the avenue. Fresh horses were saddled, and he rode on to the pasture lands and mountain encampments, summoning his subjects to the funeral of their sovereign.

Though lineal descendant of the great Genghiz Khan, the old ruler's power had diminished and

he was a mere fief of the Chinese Government. His estates had been cut down until he was virtually only king of the Gobi, as nearly all the arable land had been taken from him. The winter palace was in Cumul and the summer palace in this Artem oasis. Though shorn of his grandeur, his own people, the Turkis, viewed him as their king. They held him in veneration, and for the days that followed no woman would take down her tambourine, or sing a lullaby, because the great Khan lay dead.

Every approach to Cumul swarmed with excited Turkis, come to do homage to their dead ruler, and when the linen-swathed body was carried to the blue-tiled mausoleum to be laid among its forbears, many thousands followed the bier.

Next day a solemn *cortège* paraded the streets, carrying banners and scrolls to eulogise the dead monarch. Largess was distributed with Oriental profligacy, and a change of raiment was given to each mourner. Money was flung from the palace terraces to the crowd in the courts below, and there was free hospitality for all comers, with feasting for the more honoured guests. Each day at cock-crow the Ahungs, scholars and students hastened to the tomb, that dawn might find them engaged in prayers for the dead. At the great ceremony,



when the heir in person received gifts from his subjects, thousands of presents were laid at his feet and a record was written to preserve the names of the loyal.

There were many who had anxiously watched the old Khan's life slowly ebbing, for it was known that his death would be a crucial hour for the Turki people, and might be made the opportunity for robbing them of their few remaining rights and territories. Events proved how well grounded their fears were. One year later the young Khan was a prisoner in the Chinese Governor's Yamen. The beautiful old winter palace was razed to the ground, its priceless treasures looted, the farms of the Turkis burnt out, and the glades and orchards of Artem had become the headquarters of the Moslem insurgents.

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When they left the Khan's palace, yet another crossing of the great Gobi lay before the Trio - a journey on which only the fool starts without misgivings. The sands of the desert are strewn with too many human bones to allow for any lightness of heart in those who traverse it. This time it was midsummer, the season of torrid heat, revolting flies and accumulations of stinking filth in the oases. With a swiftness known only to

dwellers in the East, cholera seized Evangeline who, in a few hours, was a mere shadow of her former self with life hanging in the balance. The conditions were unspeakable; she lay on the floor of a small inn court, between a stagnant pool and a pigsty. The nearest place with good water was thirty miles away, but could she possibly stand ten hours in a jolting, springless cart? The decision had to be made, and that immediately. To move on was a great risk, to stay offered small chance of recovery. Mildred and Francesca asked for guidance and decided to move her. The mule cart was converted into an ambulance by padding it with the bedding of the three, and all risk of contagion had to be ignored. Barely conscious and soothed by a sleeping draught, the patient was lifted in, her two nurses sat on the shaft board, and they travelled all night, stopping every few miles to see how she fared.

In the cool dawn they reached the hamlet of Flowing Water, the tent was set up and Evangeline moved into it. The air was life-giving. To the west lay Lob, to the east were Gobi's glorious spaces of unoccupied land. The Barkul snow range towered on the horizon, its dazzling snowfields sparkling against the azure sky, and the water from its glaciers was brought to the very tent

door by means of the *kariz*.\* Blessed be the early oases makers, who so patiently laboured to dig out that channel which, far underground, conveyed pure water to the plain. This beautiful, God-prepared field hospital supplied oxygen, free and unlimited, an uncontaminated icy spring in which food could be better kept than in an ice house, and a sun beating so powerfully on the hot sand that it served as a steriliser. In the pool near-by the nurses could dip a sheet and hang it up to cool the tent, when the midday heat was intense. There was nothing lacking but food.

Every Gobi traveller must carry all his supplies, but the bags of flour which were to feed the party were of little use for a cholera patient, and of invalid nourishment there was none.

Next morning the anxious nurses were moving before dawn. The patient was exhausted, and the urgent problem of nourishment seemed insoluble. There was kindling to be collected and the prickly desert thorn was hard to find. Francesca, going afield to collect it, heard a gentle voice behind her:

“Missionary, you have a sick person with you. I am afraid she is very ill, so I have brought you down a bowl of milk.”

“Milk! Is there milk in the desert?”

\* *Kariz*.—Underground irrigation channel.

"Yes," she said, "there is, for my husband was sent here to repair the *kariz*, and we dared not leave our cow behind in the hills, there are too many robbers about. She has just calved, so you can have all the milk you want for your sick friend."

Looking into the woman's kind, gentle eyes, Francesca realised that there was something behind this. Moreover the use of the word "missionary" suggested association with Christian communities.

"This is very kind," she said, "but why do you address me as missionary? Have you ever known any missionaries?"

"Yes," she said. "When I was a little girl I had the saddest of childhoods. My parents were too poor to keep me, and they sold me to a man when I was ten years old. He carried me off to a large town several months' journey from here. Once I was very ill, and when he thought I was going to die he took me to a mission house, where a foreign lady looked after me. I can never forget all her kindness."

This Moslem woman was a friend in need during those difficult days, for she brought fire-wood from the little store which her husband had laid up, and supplied all the milk the patient needed.

"When I sent you forth lacked ye anything?" Christ asked of His disciples. "Nothing," was their answer.

**PART SEVEN**  
**AMONG THE BANDITS**

“When wilt thou save the people?  
O God of mercy, when?  
The people, Lord, the people,  
Not thrones and crowns, but men!  
Flowers of thy heart, O God, are they;  
Let them not pass, like weeds, away—  
Their heritage a sunless day.  
God save the people!”

## AMONG THE BANDITS

**T**HE TRIO were probably the only people in the City of Prodigals who dared to smile at the stories of General Lei's wonderful prowess. It sounded so ridiculous that a child of fifteen should walk out of his father's house in a tiff, call himself "General" and within a year have earned for himself the surname of "The Thunderbolt," and be terrorising a whole province.

Their first instinct was to laugh at the whole thing, but when news came that he was leading an army of twenty thousand Moslems and that no one could resist him, things took on a different complexion. Then, unexpectedly, camel caravans came to the town, bringing refugees who told circumstantial stories of his atrocities.

"The Thunderbolt," now aged eighteen, was evidently no ordinary boy. This is the story of his origin. A certain famous general had betrayed a friend to death. From that hour he knew no peace of mind, for the vengeful spirit of General Fan rose between him and all life's securities. In every ill fortune he saw the hand of the dead man, and if luck favoured him, he feared the more,

being convinced that the vindictive spirit would turn it in some way to evil. Even his hope of a son was poisoned with fear, and as the hour of birth drew near, his spirit fainted within him, for this, if ever, would be the hour of retribution.

As he sat waiting among the oleander trees in his courtyard, the people around him were horrified to see him spring up, stare into space and call out : "General Fan has come." He fell unconscious to the ground at the very moment when a confidential servant came from the inner court to say : "There is an occasion of great rejoicing, my General. Your son is born." That child became the famous "Thunderbolt" – a mascot to his troops, a terror to his own family, and a scourge to the trade routes of Central Asia.

This time there was no doubt about it, General Lei with his army was moving towards the City of Prodigals and travelling so swiftly and secretly that no one knew when he might arrive. Town defence was mobilised and each house required to supply at least one young man for training. When the recruiting officer marched into the mission compound and called upon the Church Elder to produce his man, the only youth available was young David, aged eighteen and apprenticed to a Christian shoemaker.



He would be required to wear the uniform of the City Defence Force, appear at daily drill and spend his nights patrolling the city wall.

Now this David was not a man of war, and he viewed all these martial activities with the uttermost distaste. What he loved was to bend over his last, and produce shoes with soles of paper and uppers of twill calico. His reluctance was such that the Church leaders were compelled to hold a meeting in order to coerce him into recognition of his civic duty.

The meek David stood fingering his cap, while the Church officers sat round and looked at him.

“David,” said the Elder, “we consider it your duty to join up in the Defence Force.”

Silence.

“You need not fear to lose your job, because when this little trouble is over, you will be received back into the shoe-shop.”

Still silence.

“The town supplies a uniform, so that will be a new suit of clothes for you,” the Elder said in an encouraging tone.

Here his father broke in : “David is not strong,” he said, “and he is afraid of the cold on the city wall at night.”

“Cold at night !” said the Elder; “we will

soon settle that. I have a warm, cosy cap with rabbit-skin flaps which button down over the ears, and I will lend it to David."

"The Defence Force has to drill at dawn and David suffers from chilblains," his father persisted.

"A pair of wadded socks is what he wants," countered the Elder. "The material shall be bought from Church funds and my wife will make them up. I think too, the shoe-shop ought to find a good pair of misfits for him."

David, seeing all his subterfuges demolished one by one, feebly braced himself to the hated duty of warfare. Then, with a great rush of generosity, one of the leaders spoke up and said :

"Let us not be mean over this business. I propose that David be supplied with a dollar a month for pocket money, so that he never lacks a penny to buy a little extra food. I think also that his father may be spared to carry hot soup to him on the city wall each evening."

Under the pressure of such tender compulsion David had no option but to yield, and three days later he appeared in a blue cotton uniform with a large white calico badge across his chest on which was written : "Li David. Age 18. Member of the City Defence Force."

The Children's Band used to visit the drill-ground

on purpose to see their friend David being taught the feints and postures of war, and on the day when he was first supplied with a sham gun, with which he learnt to take aim and pull the little peg which stood for trigger, their delight knew no bounds.

As things became more critical spies, disguised as priests and beggars, were sent out collecting information, and one night they crept back with the terrifying news: "The army is only ten miles away and will be here in a few hours." The regiment of volunteers which had been drilling for weeks in preparation for this very emergency, decided, in a moment, to offer no resistance. The city gates were thrown open and while the chief magistrate rode out to receive "The Thunderbolt," the new Law Courts were rapidly furnished to house him. Chairs, tables, beds, wash-hand basins, clocks, lamps and rugs were levied from unwilling citizens for the use of General and Staff. Bread shops were cleared of their bakings and butchers' shops of their meat, to supply the army with food.

When General Lei himself rode into the town, it was gaily decorated with banners bearing eulogistic mottoes: "Welcome to the saviour of the people." "Friend of the people, live for ever." "Opener of China's highways, advance."

Word was circulated that he was well pleased with the welcome, and that if the town continued to entertain him suitably, it would not fall under his displeasure.

Men and horses were billeted in every court and the men given *carte blanche* to take all they would. There was a whisper on the market-place that the fortunes of the bandits were not so rosy as they appeared and that Government troops were pressing after them. The General's own report was quite different. According to him he was on his way to Chinese Turkestan, where Nanking would appoint him Governor. The rumour that Turkestan was his objective was confirmed by his ordering the town to supply many thousands of iron tent pegs, and a thousand pairs of bellows for blowing up camp-fires. This indicated that he was making preparations for a desert journey. The town shod his horses, repaired his saddles, and made tons of biscuit bread to help the army across its Gobi stages. Under cover of darkness his scouts spent their nights in stealing horses, mules, wheat, money, women and anything else they fancied. Few of the citizens ever undressed and all were busy digging holes, in which to bury their possessions.

For the first time since they reached Kansu, the

Trio were short of money, and were a poor catch for the brigands, who levelled guns at them from their own roof.

"Send your husbands up here, quick!" one of them called out.

"Sorry, we have none to send" was the answer.

"They are vowed to celibacy" a cautioning voice whispered in the gloom.

"Anyhow you must find a man to come up and parley" the first man continued.

The only man in the house was a peaceable old servant, and he was hoisted on to the roof, where a whispered conversation took place, from which he returned white and trembling.

"They ask a lot of questions," he reported, "all about our household and our money supplies."

"What did you tell them?"

"I told them there was very little silver, and that we were poor; but they say poor or not, they *must* have money, and there are armed men waiting to take it by force if we do not give it up. Please, Teacher, give them all you have and save our lives. Don't begrudge money."

The Trio found it rather nerve-racking to stand and watch the brigands play with the triggers of their levelled guns, so they invited them to come down and bargain. Nothing, however, would induce

them to leave the roof, and the demands finally became so insistent that all the money in the house, which was little enough, and but a fraction of what they demanded, was handed over. They still refused to leave and were getting really angry, when there was a flash from a swinging lantern and the very man in whose house the Chief of Staff was quartered, walked in. He stared in amazement to see this midnight parley between missionaries and brigands and slipped off to summon help. The robbers also thought well to make away, but later on lowered themselves into the stable and led off the two best beasts it held.

When the friend returned he found the coast clear. An unaccountable impulse, he said, had compelled him to get up and come round to the missionaries' house at this unusual hour. The next day the Staff Officer himself called. He was a native of the Balkans and acted as Military Adviser to "The Thunderbolt." "The General is furious that his men should have dared to rob you," he said, "but mules and money will be returned to-morrow morning. He is determined to make the culprits pay the full penalty. Three of them will be executed at dawn." It was useless to plead for leniency. The order had been given. Late into the night the Staff officer sat on and by

his presence saved the house from sharing in the general looting, but no executions took place for, at dawn, the whole army evacuated and the two stolen mules were harnessed to the General's personal cart.

As soon as there was reliable information of the brigand army being safely over the Turkestan border, the pursuing punitive force moved North-West. The City of Prodigals got busy with preparations to give the Government troops at least as cordial a welcome as they had extended to General Lei lest they be suspected of secret alliances. There were, however, those eulogistic posters to be disposed of and the Chamber of Commerce hastily hired a number of men to scrape from the walls all the bills which praised him and replace them with others indicting him as "Prince of Murderers," "Despoiler of the North-West," "Chief instigator of all iniquity."

Feasts were made to welcome the next army and the new Law Courts were swept and regarnished for the newcomers. The rooms were not quite so grand as before, because "The Thunderbolt" had carried off most of the clocks and all the rugs when he left. The punitive force rested and feasted for a few days, then moved on in pursuit, but six weeks later returned, so triumphantly victorious

that it had never even sighted the enemy, who, by this time, was two months' journey away on the other side of the Gobi desert, and if rumours were correct, not likely to return.

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With the bandits away in Turkestan and the punitive force cantering quietly home to receive the ovation due to a victorious army, the North-West area was left clear for another missionary journey. Even the City of Sands, closed to the preachers for the last five years by reason of mutiny and rebellion, was now quiet and peaceful. It was too good an opportunity to be neglected and the missionary caravan was soon under way.

The travellers saw for themselves the havoc wrought by the brigands. The countryside was full of small bands, deserters from the main army, who were doing business on their own account. Every night farms were being sacked and women carried off to be abandoned later on. Even in the towns a few rifle-shots were sufficient to bring the magistrate to his knees, and to force from him silver which he, in turn, levied from the populace. Wherever General Lei had passed he had emptied the arsenal, and left the town defenceless.

They passed through the portal of the Great Wall of China, spent a few days in Jade Gate and



moved on to the City of Peace, where they left the main road and travelled south-west for four days over an arid stretch. At the end of each day's stage was a small well of bitter water, but when the City of Sands came in sight they entered a beautiful oasis. This town is the farthest outpost of China on the north-west, at the opening of what was once the greatest of Asia's ancient trade routes, connecting east with west.

Tunhwang, to use the Chinese name, was once the battlefield where China and Tibet fought for supremacy. In 759 A.D. it was conquered by the Tibetans, but from the middle of the ninth century their rule declined and finally China overcame. Its inhabitants have always been proud and exclusive, and like to call their town "Little Peking."

The oasis is crammed with relics of historical interest and when the natives found the Trio keen about such things, they delighted to show them old tablets and stone figures, hidden away in the temples, as well as every kind of ancient vase, pot and coin which had been dug out of the sands.

The most beautiful place in the oasis is the Lake of the Crescent Moon, hidden among the sandhills, and the most famous is the great cliff, honeycombed with cavities, known as the Caves of the Thousand Buddhas. The walls of these caves are decorated

with a profusion of frescoes covering a very long period of Eastern art.

The City of Sands, being four days' journey from the main road, had escaped pillage by the army, though it had suffered more than most towns from earlier ravages; the garrison was still intact and the town was well defended for, in addition to the regular troops, three thousand volunteers had joined up and been well drilled by competent men. The city wall had been repaired, the gates strengthened, and there were enough stones piled up on the walls to keep an enemy at bay. No one entered the town without the most searching investigation and not even the missionaries were admitted until credentials had been examined.

Their first Sunday in the City of Sands was a memorable day. It was hoped that a few people would meet for public worship, but to everyone's amazement the inn room was crowded to the doors and, after the service was over, one and another stood and asked to have his name enrolled on a list of enquirers. In great surprise the missionaries looked round on this group of men and women who called themselves Christians and wondered how this came to be.

"Where did you hear the Gospel? When did you believe?" they asked.

"How should we not believe when six years ago you came and preached to us? You left us the Scriptures, we read them and know that they are true." It seemed as if the hour for reaping had suddenly come and, foreseeing the rush of harvest, a letter was sent to the City of Prodigals for reinforcements. The helpers that were asked for, started, but communications were cut and they never reached the City of Sands.

Meanwhile, there was not a day to be wasted. Each morning, as soon as it was light, visitors came, some of them bearers of invitations to neighbouring farms; there were women to be instructed, children to be taught, sick people to be seen and meals had to be fitted in, when and how it was possible.

One night when the Trio were camping among the villages, they sighted six riders galloping through the sandhills, and their bearing was warlike and arrogant. Twelve hours later everyone knew that "The Thunderbolt's" army, carrying its wounded mascot, had recrossed the Gobi desert, occupied the City of Peace and was falling back on the City of Sands.

The gates were closed, the walls manned by the town garrison backed by the volunteer Defence Force, and there was show of a very stout resistance.

That same day six riders came thundering at the gates, shouting the usual ultimatum : " Our General demands instant capitulation. If he be received with honour the City of Sands will be exalted, if he be refused admission, this town will be razed to the ground and its inhabitants slaughtered."

The threat had been so ruthlessly executed in other cities that the officials trembled like men under sentence of death. Before sunset the mandarin, surrounded by his bodyguard and followed by his underlings, was handing over the keys of the town and the guns of the garrison. The Defence Force came tumbling down from the city wall without having thrown even one of the stones, each man secretly delighted to be spared the risks of battle, and eager to make a bee-line for home.

Once safely inside the town, the brigands reminded the magistrate that he had given offence by manning the walls and closing the gates, therefore, though the General would deal leniently and there would be no wholesale slaughter, the Defence Force must be ready to march to headquarters in the City of Peace, where the men would be received into his own army.

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It was black Saturday when a rider came to the City of Sands, bearing a dispatch from the

General which demanded that two of the foreign women be conveyed immediately to his headquarters. The mayor of the town, with a group of councillors, came to break the news, but the foreign women's answer was : "No." At this the mayor shook his head very seriously. "You and I are both under that man's orders," he said. "He has sent a military guard to fetch you, and you should consider yourselves lucky that you have been commanded to go in a courteous way. My orders are to hand you over and I dare not disobey."

Making a virtue of necessity the Trio bowed to the inevitable, but on one point they were adamant: they would not be separated. Moreover, they would travel in their own cart and take their own servant. The mayor was pleased enough at this arrangement, as it saved him the trouble of stealing someone else's cart and servant for their use. It was a dismal experience to leave before the dawn of a bleak November morning on the four days' journey across Gobi. As they drove out of the city the armed escort fell in to right and left of them, pushing up from the rear a band of two hundred young men, many of whom were tied together with ropes, and who were also bound for headquarters. They were the takings of the latest press-gang raid.

There was a small group of Christians to see the missionaries leave, and they turned away to hide their emotion, for they never expected to see their teachers back again, knowing, that of the daily parties which left for that camp, none ever returned. This, however, was not the Trio's attitude; they hated going, but if it had to be done they would go with their heads up, and accordingly the armed guards had to wait while the Christian band prayed and sang its song :

*"I am weak, but Thou art mighty,  
Hold me with Thy powerful hand."*

"They can't travel without that," the captain explained to his men.

The cavalcade moved due north in the teeth of an icy blast, and the conditions of each night's camp were so difficult that it was impossible ever to cook a meal. Bread and tea was the menu for those four days, and when the guard sighted bread, it came to "borrow" some for its own supper. It was well for the Trio that they were inured to hardness and could take it philosophically.

Each morning there were two or three lads missing from the band of recruits for, under cover of darkness, the local boys who knew every ridge

and mound in that uniform plain, would crawl away, burying themselves, if needs be, to the neck in loose sand to escape observation. If caught, deserters were shot, or flogged till the flesh hung in ribbons from the bone.

On the afternoon of the fourth day they reached brigand headquarters. Every house in the town had been commandeered, every shop was closed, and of all artisans only the blacksmiths remained. They were busy shoeing horses, mending carts and hammering iron into clumsy weapons. The streets were alive with brigand activity. Fine horses, looted from Turkestan, were being exercised, squads of recruits marched to and from the drill-grounds. Parties of foraging scouts galloped in and out of the town, sometimes urging on a quiet, patient, long-suffering peasant who, hungry himself, was made to bring in his stores of wheat, including that which had been laid up for next spring sowing.

The Trio were duly handed over to the General's bodyguard and lodged in a schoolroom near his own house. Loud orders were shouted that they were to be fed from the communal stores, and with a flourish of the pen, the secretary drew up a ration ticket which read :

“Hand over on demand twenty pounds of

wheaten flour and four measures of millet. For the mules likewise thirty pounds of grass and grain sufficient, etc., etc."

The hungry cook seized the ration ticket to present it immediately at the military stores, but was quickly back, carrying a very small bag of the poorest millet.

"To-day's provisions are all finished," he grumbled. "There is no flour, no grass, no grain, and only just enough millet for our supper."

A little later an orderly came to summon the Trio to "The Thunderbolt's" presence. He occupied the best house in the town, and his guest-room was heated with a brass brazier of burning firewood. He sat on a dais, spread with handsome rugs, and the walls were hung with British firearms. His bodyguard was composed of fierce, ruthless, bearded and turbaned men, all typical brigands, heavily armed. In their midst the General offered a complete contrast, for he was tall, slender, elegant, perfumed and effeminate. He leaned back on the dais, discussing the matter of an execution, with delicate, languid movements and in nonchalant fashion. A certain man had displeased him and he was to be shot, but, his offence having been but a slight one, someone dared to plead for him. General Lei was peevishly murmuring: "How



can I overlook it when he didn't do what I told him? I must have him shot."

A moment later he was asking for medical advice regarding an unhealed gunshot wound, and his weary voice sharpened in fear, lest the application of a disinfectant should cause a smart to his delicate flesh. Yet before the interview was over, he was again giving orders which, when carried out, must plunge good, honest, hardworking men and women into an abyss of grief.

It was anxious work to be guests of a brigand chief, for any night the whole army might be on the run, and carry the Trio with them, or the town might be surrounded by an attacking force. There were secret negotiations in progress and everyone was nervous as to their outcome. It was probably because of these that he wanted to have the three foreigners in his camp.

Each day seemed more difficult than the last. The cook was in despair, for he could secure nothing but a small daily ration of millet to feed the whole party. The cold was increasing every day, and they had not even firewood to burn in the brazier. The carter was goaded to madness because the sleek mules which had been stolen from the Trio in the City of Prodigals were being fed in the very courtyard where the missionaries were housed,

while the team which had replaced them was being slowly starved.

"If we stay here much longer, our beasts will be so weak that they will never drag us away," he growled.

The Trio's great fear was that they share the fate of all who came to this camp and find themselves detained indefinitely. They knew that the greatest caution was needed, because any suggestion that they wished to move might so easily be met with a refusal, and a refusal from the General would make it impossible to reopen the subject.

If anything was to be done, it must be the right thing at the right time and in the right way, or they would be in a worse position than before. "The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord as the watercourses: He turneth it wheresoever He will." Therefore to the Lord they committed their cause, and waited for His deliverance.

After some time guidance was given when the Chief of Staff called to see them. As he spoke French fluently, it was possible to talk to him of private matters in public. They knew the moment had come, and made a bold request to be allowed to return to the City of Sands. He listened to all they had to say and promised to do what he could to help them. To their amazement, when he came

again he was bearer of the permit they had scarcely dared to hope for, which allowed them to return to the oasis they came from, but simultaneously a command was issued to the magistrate to detain them within the oasis borders.

At the last interview with General Lei nothing was said about leaving, lest he should suddenly alter that fickle mind of his and withdraw the permission. Yet, knowing it to be the last, certain things had to be said, and standing in front of the Chief, one of the party handed him a copy of the New Testament and of the Ten Commandments of God, bidding him have a care for his soul. He stood and listened quietly to the exhortation, while the bodyguard stared, amazed at the daring of these women.

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In a few weeks the Chinese City of Sands was transformed into a Turki settlement. The Moslem rebellion which "The Thunderbolt" led in Turkestan had temporarily collapsed, and all who had taken part in it, with their wives and children, followed the army across the desert in wild confusion. Hundreds perished by the roadside of hunger, thirst, wounds or disease, and the incoming refugees added the last quota of misery to the town. Even the wealthy were faced with starvation,

because the army had to be fed, and there was nothing left over for civilians. The seed which farmers had put aside for spring sowing was seized, all supplies from outside were cut off, and merchants, robbed of their goods and money, closed down their shops. Everyone was anxious, everyone was sad, everyone was perplexed and everyone was fearful of the future.

The Trio arrived back from the General's camp to find themselves homeless. The landlord of the inn was a Moslem, and by reason of Islam's brotherhood had to break his word to the Christians and give preference to the followers of the Prophet. They found temporary shelter, but there was no space whatsoever to accomplish the things which they were there to do – preach, teach and evangelise.

Just when they were most perplexed, God took the issue in hand. A certain merchant chanced to hear on the *bazar*,\* that the three foreigners were back from the General's camp and that they were homeless. "That must not be," he said. – "They were very kind to me when I met them at the Lake of the Crescent Moon last month, and gave me some medicine for my eyes, which have been better ever since." Turning to his manager he said: "Take my card to the ladies and say that if they

\* *Bazar*.—Shopping quarter of a Central Asian town.

want a house they may have the use of the Blue Courts, which are standing empty, and they may move in as soon as they like."

That very day the Trio took possession of the best house they ever occupied in China. It had rows of large rooms, good kitchens, fine stabling, and best of all, a spacious guest-hall to hold two hundred people. There was no furniture, but the courteous Chinese never let one down on such details, and before night one neighbour had lent a table, another two chairs and yet another loaned a few benches. A large brass brazier was hired, and when the walls were decorated with gay Christian posters the place looked very cheerful, and the household settled in with deep gratitude.

They only enjoyed the Blue Courts for twenty-four hours as at the end of that time a robber band rode horses into the stables, threw rugs on to the *kangs* and ordered the missionaries to "look sharp and quit." It was a bad case of "loss of face," and not easy for the Trio to understand why they should have been exalted and then abased before everyone, but they knew it was up to them to trust though they could not understand, and trusting meant taking both incidents from the Hand of God. Therefore, having to clear out, they would do it as pleasantly as possible.

It was drawing on towards evening and they were without shelter for the night, as there was now not even an inn-room to fall back on. As they packed all their possessions into the carts their cry to God was, that if they had made a mistake in leaving the inn, as Beelzebub strongly insinuated they had, they might be kept from making another. There was an earnest desire for guidance, and when the carter, whip in hand, turned and said: "Teacher, whither?" without hesitation came the answer: "To the Lake of the Crescent Moon." It was dark when they got there, but the kindly old priest, guardian of the shrine, opened the deserted Pilgrim House and invited them to make use of it.

The City of Sands takes its name from the ranges of sand-dunes which lie to the south, stretching out into the great desert of Lob. As far as eye can see they roll in undulating softness, the outline of each crest blurred by sand-spray and their smooth slopes towering precipitously. In one cup of the sand-dunes lies a sapphire crescent-shaped lake. It is only half a mile long and on its narrow band of shore stand temple buildings nestling among trees whose leaves are silver and whose fruit is gold. The water fowl nest in the sedge by the water's brink and nothing has ever disturbed the peace of this place where the sands muffle every sound.

There is only just room to walk between the water's edge and the steeply sloping wall of sand. This sand always appears to threaten the little lake and would inevitably smother it, but for the wind, which in an inexplicable way blows the falling sand upwards, tossing it back among the dunes.

These sandhills possess the curious property of singing when the sand is moved. Before the desert gale blows, a sound like the rattle of drums is heard but at any time the sands can be induced to sing their curious song to any who will pay the price of climbing their steep ascent. The Trio often did so, and from the knife-edge of the highest point slid down the sharp incline just for the sheer fun of hearing the great vibration which seemed to spring from the very centre of the mighty hill of loose sand. They soon learned which of the dunes would sing, and which, though of identical aspect, remained persistently silent.

At midwinter the lake was a sheet of ice, swept clean from any grains of sand which might have fallen on its surface, by the upward trending winds. The Pilgrim quarters were very cold, the temperature was below zero and the party was dependent for firing on any odds and ends that could be picked up, but all were so thankful for the shelter of a roof that they were not in critical mood, and wherever

there was old tamarisk root to be found, they went grubbing in the sand for it.

The Trio often reminded each other that there were no terms in the commission under which they served to exempt them from difficulties, discomforts, dangers or inconveniences, and they had not a word to say if these were their daily portion. Their Master had nowhere to lay His head and should the servant expect more than his Lord? When plans were upset and they were landed in discomfort they understood that they had to accept these fresh orders cheerfully and make the best of the situation. On the other hand, Christ had promised to make them sharers of His joy and they knew that His peace passed all understanding.

Every few days some brigand band, foraging among the farms, rode out to the lake to levy a further contribution from the old priest. As they left the old man would watch them disappear and shake his head: "We have fallen on bad days; Heaven is punishing men for their evil deeds, but we knew trouble must come when the moon was eclipsed on the night of her festival." Meanwhile the missionaries set themselves to evangelise the area nearest the lake and a great time they had among the farms. They preached the word unhindered, and it had free course and prevailed.



During those weeks of exile they revisited the Caves of the Thousand Buddhas, where the guardian was an old friend. They had no reason to be hurried, and spent some days wandering among the innumerable caves and shrines which are hollowed, tier upon tier, out of the cliff. It is a wonderful gallery of art, and the frescoes depict every incident in the life story of the Buddha, as well as lovely scenery of the Elysian gardens of the Chinese paradise and countless other scenes. But the Trio's main object was not to view ancient paintings, interesting though these be. They climbed those steep ascents and walked the perilous planks, in order to deposit in each remote cave a copy of the Scriptures. Their confident hope was that some weary pilgrim, sitting down to rest on his toilsome penance, might find there the end of his quest, in the story of the Lamb of God.

Days passed into weeks and still there was no place for them in the town. It was now nearly Christmas and the converts inside the city were hoping their teachers would be with them for this first joyful celebration, but it seemed impossible. Then something happened. On the night of December the twenty-third there was a quarrel and a fight in the Blue Courts, pistols were fired and the whole town was in alarm. The officer

in command rushed to the scene to find wine, an orgy of feasting, women and gambling. Drunken soldiers were flourishing firearms and shooting at random. He ordered instant evacuation of the premises, a move which for certain private reasons of his own he was not sorry to bring about, and packed the women back to the house they came from.

He would have liked the Blue Courts for himself, but in such an army, an officer cannot with safety live in a better house than his men, and the simplest solution of his problem was to get the missionaries back. He forthwith dispatched an orderly to the Lake of the Crescent Moon with a letter inviting them to return at once. Simultaneously the landlord, who feared the perils of an empty house, also sent his servant on the same errand, and the leader of the Mosque who, by breaking his word, had stranded them homeless, saw an opportunity of making amends, and wrote a letter urging their return. Therefore, escorted by three mounted messengers, the Trio arrived in triumph at the Blue Courts with enough daylight left in which to sweep the house clean and arrange for Christmas celebrations.

The City of Sands was an important place in the days of Nestorian Missions, but never since then

had the birth of the Saviour been commemorated there. On the great day the congregation gathered, and good tidings of great joy, as was fitting, were proclaimed to a company including Chinese, Tibetans, Turki and Mongols, all of whom heard that day why the Lord Jesus came to earth and what the message was, that His ambassadors were commissioned to deliver.

At the close of the service the inner circle shared a simple meal. When the guests had all gone and evening closed in, the Trio had time to sit round the blazing brushwood, remember all the Christmases of the years they had spent together and consider the way by which they had been led. There were happy memories of furlough festivities among friends and relatives in the security of home, with all the traditional setting of the feast, but the recollection of chiming church bells was best not dwelt upon. The thought of boisterous days among the merry school children of Hwochow and the tall Christmas tree laden with presents, stirred remembrance of the carol-singing at dawn by which the missionaries were bid awake and salute the happy morn. Two weeks' journey away in the City of Prodigals a Christian community was gathering this very day to celebrate the birth of a Saviour of Whom, but a few years ago, they

had never even heard and now, literally in the uttermost parts of the earth, in the City of Sands, there was joyful commemoration and peace among men of goodwill. It was a thrilling retrospect and they responded to it with profound joy.

For ten years they had tramped the great North-West and the early vision which had come to them of trade-routes captured for the spread of the Gospel, was realised. Tens of thousands of Scripture portions were scattered up and down those great highways, and every city they had touched was posted over with the Ten Commandments of God. On the witness of the prodigals themselves, those mighty words had checked them in the pursuit of evil.

Six times, in missionary journeys, the Trio had covered the North-West area and now the witness was to be carried once more into Turkestan. The Gospel had been preached through Inner Mongolia and in the Tibetan lamaseries. For a decade they had been homeless and without material comforts, literally pilgrims in a strange land, but physically they had, if anything, gained in the power of endurance. There was, however, no denying that the signs of wear and tear were evident, so they preferred to travel without a mirror.

In the only things that mattered, they had gained

immeasurably and the nearness and reality of Christ had become so intense, that He was truly their Saviour, Guardian, Friend, Prophet, Priest, King, Lord, Life, Way and End – they having Him lacked nothing.

On this Christmas day their fare was but tea and bread, and they were in the hands of a bandit General whose next whim might be to carry them off anywhere, yet their hearts burned within them as they said: “For Christ’s sake, it is worth it, a thousand times over.” “Blessed be the Lord God of Israel Who only doeth wondrous things.”

. . . . .

The great Chinese festival of New Year was no feast at all with robbers in control and food at famine prices. For the first five days of the year the North-West was accustomed to give itself up to the delights of the gaming-tables, but this time even the lure of the dice lost all charm for the heart-sick people. Any young man who showed himself in the street would certainly be seized by the press-gang, and recruiting officers swept down on the farms at unlikely hours and carried off all on whom they could lay hands. But the yokels were sharper than they looked, and the stupid, one-eyed fellow who opened the farm door so clumsily, had been put there to give a secret sign, and delay the

scouts long enough for the youngsters to get into hiding. The ruses of the shop assistants were unfathomable - they hid, they disguised themselves and they feigned sickness. Thousands of recruits had been marched to headquarters and still peremptory orders came to dispatch more.

Wits, however, were not all on one side, and one morning the main street was unexpectedly gay with booths, at which eager groups of soldiers, disguised as farmers, squatted and tried their luck. An inspired word went round that the press-gang was out of the way, and there was a chance of sport. Like birds to lime the grinning yokels came, and apprentices who had hidden themselves for weeks, slipped round with a string of cash up their sleeves. For an hour there was all the delightful excitement which a game of chance supplies, then three rifle-shots, and the gamesters were surrounded by troops, roped together, marched off to the temple courts and locked behind railings, through which they could see their old fathers and mothers weeping and pleading for their release. The morale of the town sank several degrees when it was seen how cleverly its youths had been trapped.

The Turki refugees were a very piteous company. All of them were well-off merchants reduced to penury, or agriculturists who had left their lands

in Cumul and fled while their farmhouses were going up in flames behind them. The women-folk, accustomed to the seclusion of a harem, were miserable in the publicity of an inn, and every kind of sickness of the body laid hold on them. They turned to the missionary for medical help and, finding women who could converse with them in their own language, poured out the tale of their woes in the safety of the foreign women's rooms. How thankful the Trio were that they had made a start on the Turki language during their last furlough, and had persevered with it.

They often went to their old quarters in the Moslem inn to visit Turki refugees, and then they understood why they had been guided to leave, even though leaving meant enduring the discomfort of the Pilgrims' quarters. The common well had become contaminated, and in each room someone was down with enteric fever. As the frost broke up, typhus broke out, and as days went by food supplies got less.

One commodity after another had given out in the town. For months there had been no sugar, no tea, no candles, no soap and no paraffin. The city granaries were empty and swept, and the small supply of poor grain which the household needed was only secured through the kindness of friends

who, terrified at the risk they ran, stole in after dark with a bag of millet wrapped in an old coat. If it were discovered that anyone had a store of grain the soldiers immediately swooped down and carried it away for army use, and very shortly there would be nothing left in the oasis. Something had to be done and done quickly.

General Lei had issued clear orders about the foreign women - they were not to leave the oasis. His competent men had the situation in hand, and having set a guard at the only possible exit, they troubled no more about them, and their difficult position. From the Christian household prayer went up continually for wisdom to act at all times discreetly, and for intelligence to see the indication, when deliverance was at hand. The answer to the prayer for wisdom caused them to reserve, through all the shortage, a hidden store of provision, sufficient to take them across Gobi. The answer to the prayer for alertness made them conscious at a certain hour in early April, and after eight months of detention, that they were to move. Experience of God's deliverances gave them courage to obey.

Their trusty servant was immediately told that they intended to visit the north border of the oasis and that they would carry the reserve food supply



with them. Being a wise man, he asked no questions. It was important to delay discovery of the flight, and the rooms were arranged so as to make any one who peeped through the paper window believe them to be inhabited. The gay pictures remained on the wall, the table was decked with empty tins, and an abandoned quilt was spread out conspicuously, while the brazier was made ready as though for use on return. No money was owing, and even the rent was paid up to date, for those "unaccountable women" had given it in advance.

At night, and in secret, the carts were packed with the reserve flour hidden behind sleeping-bags. As the city gates opened before the town had finished its morning dose of opium, they slipped out by the south gate and, their destination being due north, so soon as they were out of sight, they made the necessary detour.

They reached the last farm on the northern border without meeting anything or anyone to confirm the rightness of the step they had taken, but at this place they stopped the cart at a threshing-floor, and enquired of the peasants where the military guards were located.

"They live in yonder temple," was the answer. "But," the old farmer added, "they are not there

just now. They rode away this morning and we have not seen them since."

This was guidance, and one more step was clear. What lay beyond that no one could know, but this much was certain - without hesitation they must make a dash for Gobi, under cover of darkness.

. . . . .

Between them and honest desert lay treacherous land, intersected with deep channels cut for oasis irrigation. It was not a cart road and the mules strained and sweated in the sticky mud of the ditches and up the steep banks. Again and again it seemed as if the axles must snap. It was midnight before they got through the labyrinth of canals on to firmer ground, and the morning star was visible when they lay down to sleep behind the sand-mounds at the fording place of a wide river. At sunrise a servant called :

"Teacher, there is a man hiding in the reeds, who is dressed in grey, but we cannot see if he is a brigand."

"Then you had better go at once and find out."

He disappeared and came again with a man who bore the stamp of a deserter on every line of him. His old, shabby uniform was worn inside-out, and a wide blue cotton sash round his waist, was

intended to make him look like a farmer. Deserters are no menace even to runaways, so the Trio shared their breakfast with him, and when he saw they were as anxious as he to avoid the military, he shared information of the road with them.

"Things could not be worse," he said; "the houses at every stage are burnt out."

"Are there any inns open?" they enquired.

"Inns! You will not see a creature between here and the Turkestan frontier, unless you happen to meet scouts from over there," he exclaimed, jerking his chin in the direction of brigand headquarters.

"What about the wells?" the Trio asked, voicing their chief fear, which was that the oasis wells should have been choked by fleeing armies, for, if this were the case, there was no escape for them.

"You will find water at the next stage," the man said, "but after that I do not know. It is uncertain."

The river ahead was an old enemy. Once before it had nearly taken the lives of the Trio and even the recognised fording place was sometimes a menacing quicksand. Every rope and strap was examined before the animals got the lash which sent them over and down the sandy edge into the swirling torrent. With shouts and deft touches of

the whip, the clever driver guided the team from point to point of the dangerous crossing, until with a final yell the mules sprinted up the steep bank.

The crossing of rushing torrents, the depth of whose waters and the condition of whose bed was incalculable, has been one of the Trio's worst perils. Sometimes it is a sudden rush of water sweeping everything before it, sometimes a collapsing bank, and sometimes a shifting of the quicksands into which cart and mules sink in a moment. All these things the Trio had experienced and at every river-crossing someone would say :

*" When I reach the verge of Jordan  
Bid my anxious fears subside ;  
Death of deaths and hell's destruction  
Land me safe on Canaan's side."*

Now time was everything, and they crossed without a hitch. A journey across Gobi by such unused tracks, could not have been attempted without a carter who was a local man. He had tested every way across the desert and seemed to smell out water like a horse. On the other side of the river was a sandy plain of such peculiar quality that any cart which stood for a moment sank to



“We saw the marks of your cartwheels  
and followed you up” said the bandits.



the axle With every beast harnessed to each cart in turn, they went over at a gallop while the passengers toiled behind, sinking at each step to their ankles. Thus one more danger was passed, and at last the solid, resisting, stony floor of Black Gobi was reached. With a feeling that the worst was over, and that two more days would bring them to a main desert track, the party pushed hopefully on.

They had travelled for some hours when suddenly there was a shout, and looking back they saw two brigands galloping behind, calling on them to halt.

"It is all up," whispered the distressed servant.  
"They have caught us."

"We are scouts from headquarters rounding up deserters and patrolling Gobi, with orders to arrest any travellers," the armed men said. "We saw the marks of your cart wheels and followed you up. Where have you come from and where are you going?"

"We are travelling to Turkestan."

"How is that? The General forbids anyone to go that way."

Seeing how confident and unperturbed the women looked in face of this challenge, the soldier hesitated and said:

“Have you a special permit?”

In a flash the man's words gave a clue to Mildred, who, alert for guidance, stood waiting. Turning to Evangeline, sitting inside the cart, she said quietly: “Give me a passport.”

Then, without a word, she handed over to the bandit, her Central Government Passport, the credential which every missionary carries. At the sight of this impressive paper with its scarlet seals, the men stared. In the mercy of God they were wholly illiterate. Not one single ideograph could they recognise, but it was incredible to them that a document so magnificent could be issued by anyone save their own war lord. The spokesman looked it over, then without a word he folded it, handed it back, saluted, and said:

“Pass on! The stages ahead are worse than you think, and you may not be able to get through, but if you have trouble there are parties of our scouts patrolling and they will escort you back to the General's camp. He will take care of you.”

The men rode swiftly off and the party went forward, but all suddenly realised that they were in much greater danger than they had allowed themselves to believe. With bands of scouts about, they ran a risk of being challenged again, and the next men would probably not be illit-



erate and might insist on detaining them. This time they had been guided and delivered wondrously, yet Mildred, true to the phrenologist's prognostications, found faith so difficult that she pursued her way tormented by every manner of questioning and doubt.

Although rebuked by an inner voice which asked: "Why so fearful? How is it that you do not understand?" it was long before equilibrium was restored and the memory of past deliverances brought confidence.

By forced marches it would take them four days to reach the Turkestan frontier station at Baboon Pass, which is fixed in a rocky ravine at mid-Gobi. Here the normal strength of the military garrison was one thousand and in this time of warfare it no doubt would be reinforced. Once within those lines they should be safe.

Between the fear of pursuit and the desolation of that howling wilderness the strain was almost intolerable. Not one living creature did they meet, but all around was the devastation of battle-fields where a pursuing army and the retreating bandits had fought it out. Wolves had been busy, but blood-smeared uniforms were scattered about and everywhere lay bones of men and of horses.

The strength of the teams was tested to the utmost and many times the carter declared that they could pull no more on such limited rations. There could, however, be no delay because the scouts had already had time to report on the escaping party at brigand headquarters, and the pursuers might be on their tracks. On they pressed at a maximum speed of three miles an hour, allowing only the briefest time for feeding the mules, until they came to the last stage before the frontier.

It was nearly midnight when they approached the ruins of the oasis formerly known as Great Spring. Nothing remained but a few blackened walls and it was difficult to trace out the little street where there had always been such friendly intercourse between travellers. The desolation was overpowering and reached its climax when, from behind a mound of rubble, there crept out a man, shaking with fear, whose terror was so great that his lips could hardly frame the words :

“When I heard voices, I thought you were a squad of brigands and I hid. Then I realised that you were our own missionaries from the City of Prodigals. Where have you come from? How did you get here? There has not been a traveller through for months.”

“What of the frontier?” they asked.

"The military guard fled when a squad of 'The Thunderbolt's' men showed themselves and threw them into a panic. I ran and hid myself here. There are still bands of them hiding about in the hills and we never know when they will come down."

. . . . .

The members of the caravan were very tired.

Nerves were overstrained by the terror of pursuit.

The hour was midnight.

They were among ruins of weird and grotesque shapes.

The ruins were full of the evidences of recent battle, carnage and massacre.

They had only one lantern with which to grope their way.

They had been startled by the man creeping out, when they thought themselves alone.

The man's panic was infectious.

The hope of safe shelter they had counted on for the next night, had vanished.

They were all hungry and there was no supper.

Out of these elements arose a condition which made sleep difficult, but each of the three, unwilling to communicate fear to the others, lay silent under the stars. They were blessed, in that memory was

stored with the great words of Scripture which stabilise the mind, give renewal of vitality to the nerves and bring the spirit back to confidence in God.

“As the mountains are round about Jerusalem, so the Lord is round about His people.”

“God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore will we not fear.”

“Thou shalt not be afraid for the terror by night.”

“The Lord of hosts is with us, the God of Jacob is our refuge.”

When the morning star rose, two were asleep and the third was quite calm because something had happened.

Over the silent spaces of Gobi, a song had come softly but with perfect distinctness. Its harmonies and the cadence of its parts were heard as plainly as though unseen choirs were singing. Not an intonation of the great chorus was missing: “He watching over Israel slumbers not nor sleeps. . . . He slumbers not nor sleeps. . . . He slumbers not nor sleeps.”

Then she fell asleep, conscious that the everlasting arms were underneath her.

. . . . .

In a few hours they were off again, making for

Baboon Pass, that tortuous ravine whose rocks are dotted with forts, and whose sandy floor is hollowed into trenches and dug-outs. The regulars had been fortifying the narrow defile for years and had erected upright stones sufficient to hide a regiment of men, each one standing invisible behind his own splinter of rock. As the carts wound through the gorge, generally buzzing with the activity of camp life, the silence was oppressive, yet who could say where snipers might be lurking among the bristling stones, so cleverly arranged as to confuse the man-like stone with the stone-like man? By the time the carts had driven right through the ravine, the Trio had no doubt that the fortress was empty and the men had fled, so again they did not delay one moment longer than was necessary.

Four days later they saw on the horizon the lovely sight of a willow tree with branches waving in the wind, the first tree since they left the City of Sands. This was the stage of "Flowing Water," where Eva had been nursed through cholera. It was now a big concentration camp, where strings of camels brought daily supplies of food, firewood and fodder from Hami. Along with the army were hundreds of stranded refugees, who were allowed neither to move forward nor backward. Half-naked and half-starved, they existed on uncertain

rations, in return for which they had been obliged to hand over all their possessions.

The arrival of the missionaries caused a tremendous stir, for they were the only travellers who had come that way for months, and seeing them, the refugees hoped that the road had somehow opened. Officials crowded round, eager for news, and the soldiers were stirred up to a good anger and cursed "The Thunderbolt" for all the trouble he had brought on their country. The fighting was not yet over, for what was banditry in Kansu had taken the form of Moslem rebellion in Turkestan, where the population is unruly Moslem and the government Chinese.

The hills of Artem, where the Trio had been the guests of the Mongol Khan, were the storm centre, and thanks to the huge dumps of ammunition collected there, the rebels were still able to hold their own. "The fertile Hami oasis was untilled, every farmhouse burnt out, all horses commandeered by the military and the cattle had long since been killed for food. The local garrison had held out for months under siege by General Lei, but the Moslem town, with the Khan's splendid palace, was razed to the ground and the busy northern *bazar* had been destroyed.

The Military Commandant of Hami issued orders

that the missionaries and party should be passed through the danger zone into a quieter area with as little delay as possible. Travel was neither pleasant nor easy. The road skirted the foot of mountains which were full of robbers, and the nights had often to be spent under canvas in the loneliest places, for the people had fled and the buildings were destroyed. Several times raiding parties attacked the camps, and once, on the other side of the foothills, they seized and carried off a caravan of Russian women, holding them as hostages for fifteen months. On another occasion, the raiders only missed the Trio by a few hours, but mercifully they did not know of these happenings until later. Of one thing they were conscious, that a strong pressure urged them forward and suffered them not to delay anywhere.

In one lonely pass two uniformed men appeared at midnight and hurried them forward on their stage. Their manner and approach were mysterious, nor did they seem to belong to the regular army. The Chinese carters were greatly perturbed, for the next march lay across a range of mountains and over that lonely path the two horsemen rode with the missionaries, who had no idea whether they were escorted by friend or foe. They travelled for hours, meeting no one and passing no dwelling.

Suddenly, in the depth of a narrow gorge, a man

emerged from a rocky enclosure which could easily have been passed and never noticed, so cleverly was it concealed among the rocks. The two horsemen turned aside and disappeared into the recess. Immediately afterwards the strange, weird sound of a lilted incantation was heard. The voice ascended in pitch and increased in volume until it held a terrifying quality, as it echoed and re-echoed through the ravine, then suddenly ceased. The Trio had no desire to delay in this sinister spot and quickly pressed on, nor did they see the escort again.

After leaving the mountains behind each stage became more reassuring. Fields were under cultivation and the peasants were busy at agricultural pursuits, so that when a town was reached where shops were open and there was food on sale, the relief was greater than can be imagined. Reports of what they had been through went ahead of them, and though not a word regarding revolt, rebellion or disaffection might be mentioned, evidences of silent sympathy were shown everywhere.

The old spirit of mischief in Evangeline was not dead yet, and as soon as they reached a place of peace she organised a small escapade on her own. The desert wind was blowing such a hurricane that travel was impossible, but there were enough sleep-



less nights behind them for her companions to welcome a day of enforced rest. Not so Eva, who must needs wander out to explore the locality, which was certainly particularly interesting.

In the middle of a stony plain was a small mound and all around it a litter of strangely-shaped stones, many of which showed signs of use by prehistoric man. Up the mound went Eva, in spite of the dangerous wind, and a moment later down she came again, head foremost, carried off her feet and whirled to the bottom. When she was able to pick herself up she had lost all sense of time, locality, direction and individuality.

One of the men found her staggering blindly about and brought her back to the room, where her companions were roused from a luxurious sleep by a confused Eva, desiring to know who she was and where she belonged. The incident was interesting as showing that many deaths in the desert may be accounted for by the bewildering effect of the wind. How easily a traveller blown into confusion, could miss the caravan, and, too stunned to locate the points of the compass, be lost. Sleep restored her and bed kept her passion for adventure quiet, for that one day.

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From the high plateau of Gobi which, in early

May, was still wind-swept and frigid, they drove day by day gently downhill until they were below sea level in the hollows of the great Turfan depression. Here the vines were in flower, the apricots changing colour and the gardens purple with ripe mulberries, the oasis was a patch of emerald in an ocean of grey sand. After a long night stage they reached the first outlying vineyards at sunrise and, as they passed, the gardener stepped out of his little sleeping shelter to stare at the unusual cavalcade.

Seeing the weary travellers, he hailed them with a friendly call : " Come down and rest and eat some of my mulberries," he shouted, so the Trio alighted and followed him through the gardens. The women brought a large sheet of homespun cotton, which they held under the boughs while he shook down quantities of luscious fruit. The mulberries were delicious and they all sat and ate them in the shade of the trees, for as soon as the sun is up, the wayfarer's only desire is to evade it. Then they pushed on to the town.

In the suburbs everyone was busy, baking bread, boiling soup and sorting fruit, but at the sight of the carts there was excitement, for no one came from a distance these days, and all were hungry for news of the General's campaign. The men were full of questions to which they only re-

ceived evasive answers, and the women gathered round, each one with a gift of bread, fruit or the offering of a cup of tea. This was not the Trio's first visit, and little Topsy, who had won their hearts last time, was the centre of attraction to the children. They all wanted to see her again, and there was a buzz of comment: "How she has grown!" "She does look happy." "See how long her plaits are." "They love her like their own child." One old Chinese man, selling hot meat dumplings from a tray, pushed to the front and exclaimed: "Why, it is little 'Lonely,' who was ill-treated and turned out to beg in the streets of my native town." Then, turning to the crowd, he said: "The Christians did a righteous act on the day they saved that child, and she will certainly turn out well."

At last the driver started the mules and the crowd had to fall back to let the party proceed to the inn. Before the beasts were stabled a man in uniform was requesting that the Trio present themselves without delay at the passport office, and a smart servant appeared with a message from the official's lady, saying she hoped the missionaries had brought their medicine-chest, as she was not well and wanted them to come *at once* and give her something to relieve headache. When a Chinese lady wants a dose of medicine it is easier to get the visit over

than to delay under the impatient urgings of the servant, whose hope of a tip depends on bringing the foreigner back with him. So the passports were inspected, the lady's headache relieved, the varied ailments of her immediate entourage attended to, and her husband's enquiries about the general conditions of road travel satisfied. Not till then did the exhausted missionaries return to their inn, having excused themselves from a luncheon at which they were to meet a party of ailing aristocrats and give them all free medical attendance.

The usual crowd of onlookers was waiting, a gaping group of the absolutely occupationless come to gratify the pleasure of watching the busy at their work. Their conversation was a string of observations, completely detached from any effort of thought: "There are three of them." "The little girl is deaf and dumb." "She eats their food!" "They wear Chinese dress." "They are drinking tea." "Two of them are real sisters, the third is a dry sister." "They are all so much alike you cannot distinguish them." "They were here two years ago." "Last time they were travelling east, now they are travelling west." Under this fire of personal remarks and obvious platitudes the Trio ate their brunch,\* after which

\* Brunch and Tupper.—Missionary combination meals.

everyone went to rest during the unbearable heat of the midday hour.

Before lying down, Mildred went to the stables to see if the mules were taking their feed, and a little later Evangeline, passing that way, saw her lying unconscious in a pool of blood, her face buried in the stable filth. In an agony of anxiety, and not knowing if she were dead or alive, Eva lifted her, and found that her head had been kicked open by a vicious donkey. A stretcher was improvised and Mildred was carried to the dirty little fly-blown room, where her companions set to work to wash the dirt out of the gaping wound. The owner of the donkey was an Islamic fellow-lodger, whose callous outlook it was, that a Moslem donkey was quite justified in wishing to end the life of a protagonist of the Christian religion.

The anxiety of such a situation is not easily realised by those who have always lived within reach of medical help. The fear of blood-poisoning, the dread of tetanus, the impossibility of securing quiet and the absence of surgical cleanliness makes such an incident a nightmare for the nurses. Eva and Francesca longed to convey her to silent, clean, spacious Gobi, but unshaded desert was not to be thought of in such temperatures. This was a case for the Great Physician to tend and it was for Him

to indicate how and where Mildred should be nursed.

They turned to Him for instructions and instantly remembered the kind gardener who had fed them with mulberries. If he would allow a tent to be pitched by his *kariz*, they would get the shade of his trees on one side and the spaces of open desert on the other. A messenger was sent, and next day, laid in the cart, the now conscious but suffering patient endured the lurches and bumps as the springless vehicle lumbered over the uneven roads. The same kind women now wrung their hands by the roadside and said: "God knows about it! God knows about it!"

The *kariz* was better than they hoped. The rushing stream was clean, and two great trees threw alternate shade across the tent. After the oppressive staleness of the inn enclosure the fresh night air brought healing sleep. Next morning cartloads of visitors began to arrive; the carts all drew up at the mulberry garden, where they disgorged parties of women dressed in their best and laden with presents. In one wild flash of fear the nurses imagined them to be patients, following up the doctor and laden with bribes to insure attention, but mercifully it was not so. A little further on was a farm where the first daughter-in-law had just

borne her first son, and this was the celebration of a Nazre. This is supposed to be a distribution of food, by the rich to the poor, but it is apt to take the form of inviting relatives and rich neighbours, who will all bring gifts and in due course return the invitation, and so repay. In the course of that day one hundred and twenty guests of the Nazre stopped to call at the hospital tent, and by evening Evangeline's knowledge of the Turfan colloquial was so much increased, that she was familiar with the complete gamut of Nazre talk.

The guests behaved fairly well, except the boys between the ages of ten to sixteen who, towards evening, collected for a row. Moslem villages are terrorised by their schoolboys, and the fathers, who want to see the children develop a full measure of arrogance and assertiveness, will not control a youth, lest his spirit be in any way tamed and the lust of fight reduced. To the Trio it was no cause of rejoicing at all that another bold brat should have been added to the male constituency of the neighbourhood, and the joys of Nazre left them cold. The boys formed a gang, demanded Scriptures to burn, stood at a short distance and lashed themselves to fury with rhythmic yells. The Trio had previous experience of having been severely stoned by just such a band of wild Moslem hooligans

and, in the circumstances, did not want a repetition of such doings.

Things were getting serious and at last Evangeline went out to deal with the situation. Parents always keep out of the way when their sons are on the warpath, but Evangeline, the experienced, was up to them, and seeing a turbaned Ahung lurking in the distance she approached him :

"Ahung," she said, "you may know that we have a very sick person here." He murmured assent.

"Listen to those boys. How can a sick person recover in all that noise?" Then before he had time to answer, she continued : "We are strangers here and we know that this is your town, but we have pitched our tent on the Gobi which is no man's land. If you wish us to leave, we will move on, but you must take the responsibility of sending us away, as it may be serious for the patient."

Terrified at the mere sound of the word responsibility, he became active at once.

"Those troublesome children," he said. "It takes all my time to keep them in order. You must not think of moving. We like you to be here."

In half an hour the incident was closed, the children were scattered, the patient was quiet, and there was no more trouble.



As soon as Mildred was well enough, the party moved on, travelling northward towards the capital of Chinese Turkestan, Urumtsi. The wound, which might so easily have proved fatal, healed and left no permanent injury to eye or head. Some unseen leaf of healing must have been laid upon it. The scar remains and that she will always carry. It is a witness that she fought and was wounded in the battles of the Lord, Who will some day be her Rewarder.

For the first stage they followed the foot of the Flame Hills, whose colour and formation has won them this name and, indeed, under the rays of the setting sun, their colour was so glowing, that the ridges which furrowed the sides, were as flames licking them from base to summit.

In the hot afternoon the carts rumbled into the narrow street of Tuyok down which there rushed a stream of clear water. It was more like a village of Tuscany than Central Asia, and bare-footed women stood ankle-deep in the water filling their gourds. The vines were in flower, the fragrance was intoxicating and the brilliant green of the vineyards, against the flame-coloured background, was a sight never to be forgotten.

When she saw Mildred's bandaged head, a woman came forward to offer the hospitality of her home.

Seeing how much the patient was suffering, she helped to carry her through the narrow doorways into a large room built on all four sides in a latticed brickwork which secured all the coolness possible. The floor was spread with fine, Khotan rugs and on these Mildred was laid, her head on the woman's own pillow. All afternoon that woman sat by her side, held her hand, fed her with mulberries and gave her frequent drinks of a special infusion which she said was a certain cure for headache. She guarded the room fiercely and would allow no one to disturb her charge. This happened in the very place where two years previously the Trio had been cursed and stoned.

The show place of Tuyok is its Mosque of the Seven Sleepers, built over the frontage of a cave in which it is believed that seven men went into retreat for one thousand years. When they emerged it was to find that the world had not improved during their absence, so they determined to rest a little longer and only reappear when men were ready for their message. This time a small dog followed them, and when they would have driven it away, it opened its mouth and rebuked them, saying: "Though but a dog am I not also a creation of Allah?" Because of that great word they allowed it to stay and share the sleep of ages.

Round the mosque entrance several *obos* had been erected, such as are common in Tibet and Mongolia, and they were decorated with tufts of hair, bleached bones and other such contemptible offerings. The Hadjis stood around and read a liturgy after which they entered into conversation with the Christians, trying, as usual, to draw them into controversy regarding the nature of the God-head, but the missionaries knew better than to let themselves be drawn into futile discussions. In the secret depths of his heart, the Hadji knows full well that neither his pilgrimage to Mecca nor the blood of goats shed at his mosque door, can remove sin, and the important thing is to let him hear the declaration of God concerning atonement.

He may spit at what he calls blasphemous words, but truth cuts, for the Logos of God is a living thing, active and more cutting than any sword with double edge, penetrating to the very division of soul and spirit, joints and marrow – scrutinising the very thoughts and conceptions of the heart.

From Tuyok the Trio travelled on over a great plain where many massive earth-works, ancient tombs and crumbling buildings, tell of former glories. The most striking was the ruined city called by the Turkis, City of Dakianus. Surrounded by a mighty wall of earth, it is full of

stately remains among which they walked for miles, tracing out the plan of the town. In the centre stand the remains of the King's Palace and in some of the buildings there are still flaking frescoes, representing Buddhist and Christian subjects. The neighbouring farmers own some remarkable antiquities – Grecian statue heads, bricks decorated in Grecian style and elegant vases, all of which have been dug up by the agriculturists, who are rapidly levelling the City of Dakianus and reducing it to the status of a ploughed field.

The villages of the Turkestan south trade-route spread themselves in a luxuriant land, whose produce is so abundant that the energies of half the population are used to transport its superfluity elsewhere. This has to be paid for in climate, and the heat haze which hangs over the watered land saps the life of all, save the natives inured to its oppression.

In that hot-house atmosphere the vines are so prolific that they bear enough seedless grapes to supply a great part of Asia with sultanas, and the grape-drying houses, built for ventilation of latticed mud-brick, add a touch of beauty to the vineyards, whose brilliant green stretches out to the foot of the Flame Mountains.

Spread out over the sandy spaces are the melon

gardens, watered by cleverly contrived irrigation channels, with perfect fruit lying out on the dry pebbles over which the hot air quivers. Orchards of apricot, nectarine, peach and mulberry, bear bountifully in their seasons, but of all their sundried fruits the best is that juicy apricot which dries to a clear gold. From each fruit the stone is removed, cracked, and the kernel folded back into the soft yellow flesh.

When the cotton ripens every available man is called upon to pack it in huge bales, lade it on camels and carry it elsewhere, and at the season of ripening corn the land is golden with mounds of maize cobs.

The people who dwell in the midst of this plenty have to bear all the toil of the land's over-productiveness, and all the exhaustion of the climate, so suitable for vegetation, and so devitalising to man. In April the heat begins to rise in successive waves, through May the inhabitants sweat, and in June they leave the surface of the soil to live in dug-outs; for every town house and every farm has underground rooms in which the family eats and rests. In July a man may lose his life by merely walking across the plain at midday.

These Turkis are a burly people; hardy, muscular, enduring, impetuous, quarrelsome and

quick-tempered. Their religion is Mohammedanism, and by its teaching they have been trained to admire arrogance, mercilessness and intolerance. To these characteristics they add a discipline which is sufficiently strong to compel them to organise life for five periods of public prayer a day, and for a month of severe fast once each year. Even if the fast falls in the torrid summer heat, neither food water nor fruit may pass the lips during the long hours from sunrise to sunset.

The populace is awakened at dawn by a sonorous voice from the minaret, calling the faithful to be up and pray, and in the midst of the busy mart the Moslem must make time, when that call is repeated, for exacting ablutions and for prayer. The discipline of abstinence is sometimes carried to lengths of real mortification for, as though the ordinary demands of Ramazan\* were not sufficient, the lonely mountain mosques have caves, where holy men are built in for a forty days' fast. The earth cave, the mud bed, the tiny inaccessible window, are all there, waiting for the next penitent and, lying in a little heap on the ground, are ninety-nine pebbles, with which as they slid between his fingers, the last immured man told off the attributes of Allah.

The woman's life is otherwise ordered, as she

\* Ramazan.—The ninth month of the Mohammedan year when the faithful must fast.

exists only for the satisfaction of man's lust, to bear his children and incidentally to minister to his material comforts. Only if, through a lifetime, she manages to keep the favour of her lord, has she the hope of being a *houri*\* in some Moslem paradise. But the Central Asian woman has the turbulent characteristics of her race, and a man often finds his hands full with the riotous elements of his women's quarters. The bride comes young, before she is fully a woman, and if her husband be a boy little older than herself, the two children soon squabble. If they make it up, well and good, but if things go too far, she is sent back to her parents, who have to find another home for her. Very often the husband is a middle-aged man, who knows by experience how to handle girls; then he is probably one who likes frequent changes, and in six months' time he will be writing out the bill of repudiation for her. Sometimes he is an old satyr, and the marriage ends in a dose of poison.

They add so much to the beauty of the scene, these lightly-veiled village girls. No dress is too brilliant for their colour-loving natures, and the little velvet cap, which holds the veil in place, sparkles with gold thread and spangles. They carry themselves with a grace peculiar to those who

\* *Houri*.—Nymph of Mohammedan Paradise.

walk barefoot, and unconsciously strike the most charming attitudes, as they gather by the fountain with their water-pots. The rich man's wife is a sadder woman ; secluded in her own quarters behind a shut door, and never allowed outside, except in a curtained cart, she spends the day in gossip, intrigue, quarrels, and in making up her face in a pitiful effort to hold the attentions of her master.

Moslem women's quarters are not accessible to the Christian missionary, unless the hand of God opens the door, but in the case of the Trio something had happened elsewhere which ensured a welcome for them among certain important merchants, and when the richest Ahung invited them to his house, all the lesser men followed suit till there were more homes open than they had time to enter. To the Trio it was a coveted privilege, for the burden of Moslem women had been heavy upon them, and there was no Christian woman missionary in any of these towns.

To have the door flung open was one thing, but what would they find the other side of the threshold? Every thought, habit, convention, and tradition which made up the mental setting of those women's lives was antagonistic to Christianity. Brought up to believe themselves soulless, it was simpler for them to accept the situation



and substitute the physical for the spiritual. To admit even the possibility of spiritual issues, meant the liberating of forces which must always, and inevitably, be at war with each other, and threaten the elemental calm of a life circumscribed by eating, drinking and fertility. The missionary, like his Master, is not to be thought of as bringing peace but a sword, and he may well set those of one household at variance with each other. To have had a window once opened into the soul through which a ray of light has penetrated, and awakened the smothered spirit, is an experience from which emerges a personal responsibility towards God, and its inevitable sequence, a sense of sin.

In a large, wealthy Central Asian household is a woman now barely thirty-five years of age, but who has more than a lifetime of trouble behind her. She was born into this family, and was the rich man's petted daughter. Her mother was the favoured wife, and little Patima lorded it somewhat over the children of the lesser wives, who came and went according to her father's whim. Until the age of eleven she was spoilt, petted, fed with dainties, indulged and dressed in the gayest and most expensive clothes.

There were many suitors for little Patima's hand, as marriage with her meant relationship with one

of Central Asia's great merchants. Every point of each proposed bridegroom was discussed in the women's quarters, and when the selection was made, she was told in detail of the delights ahead. On the marriage day she was bathed, perfumed, dressed in silk, decked with flowers, and a broad, black band was painted across her eyebrows. Then swathed in a silken veil, she was sent away and instructed henceforth to cover her face at the approach of any man, unless he be her husband.

The bridegroom was a spoilt, selfish, bullet-headed boy with staring eyes and an assertive manner, who had been accustomed to see his mother and her co-wives beaten for their slightest fault. Though but twelve years old he knew that a woman had no rights, and that her only purpose was for his pleasure. When the marriage festivities were over and he first lifted his bride's veil he was pleased enough with his new toy, for the lovely child Patima had large, lustrous eyes and two long plaits to her knees. His mother also was glad to add so charming a daughter-in-law to her household, but little Patima was not the daughter of the house here, and from the beginning she must learn subservience, obedience and docility in the presence of her mother-in-law, as well as absolute yieldingness to every whim of her boy husband.

It only took a few days for the children to quarrel, and the violent boy to snatch a stick and give her a good beating, after which he went off to school and boasted of his prowess among the other scholars. When his mother found the girl in tears she scolded, and told her she only got what she deserved. Within three months the children heartily disliked each other, and the mother-in-law was telling everyone that the rich man's daughter was unbearable. One evening there was a big flare up and little Patima, sick at heart because everyone was against her, crept out to the front door and crouched, gently wailing, under the oleander tree. Just before dark a man passed that way. He looked, stood a moment and came closer. When he spoke it was very gently :

“What is the matter, little girl?”

“My heart is full of trouble,” she answered.

“Why should your heart be troubled, little gay one?” he asked.

“Because everybody hates me. They beat me and I want to get home to my mother,” she sobbed.

“Come with me and I will take you to your mother.”

Without a word little Patima drew her veil around her, stood up and followed the stranger, but the house to which he took her was not her

mother's home, but a place from which there was no escape. Her naughty child-husband was exchanged for an evil owner, who kept her himself for a few weeks and then sold her. In a few years she passed several times from hand to hand.

At the age of eighteen she was in Kashgar, the seductive beauty of a traveller's *serai*. By this time all men, Turki, Chinese, Hindu or Russian were alike to her, but there was one Chinese who came to her room more often than the others and he pleased her, because his ways were gentler, and he was less exacting than her own people. He spoke her language well and gradually drew her story from her, then one day he spoke :

"Patima-han, I am going back to my own country. Do you come with me and be my wife. The women there are not veiled as you are, and you can do as you like in a home of your own."

Impulsively she blessed Allah for this piece of good fortune and closed with the offer. The thing had to be planned secretly, but it could be managed, for she was not strictly watched, and when the time came she wrapped her veil closely round her and followed the man through the streets. At dawn, when the city gates were opened, they slipped out, and vanished into the trade routes. For three months they rode on every day, Patima

astride a donkey, and the Chinese riding a tall mule, till they came over the great Salt desert to the first town of China. There she lived as wife to this man long enough to have lost the freshness of her beauty, and to see him gradually become the victim of his nation's curse - opium, to which he yielded without an effort. The Chinese women despised her as a foreigner, and the Moslem women spat at her for being the mistress of an idolater. She had not even the consolation of a child, for she was that accursed thing, a barren woman.

One day a Chinese woman came to the inn where Patima lived. She was ailing, and long travel had robbed her of all her strength. After a few days her child, a little girl, was born, and Patima helped her. More skilled care, however, was needed if the mother were to pull through, and as this skill was not available, she died within a few hours, of exhaustion. The little baby was left in the arms of kind Patima, who took the child, spoke to it in her own language, and shaved the hair of its baby head into the pattern peculiar to a Turki girl. As her husband became more neglectful and poverty overtook them, first her ornaments, then her clothes were exchanged for opium, but she clung the more passionately to little Ginesta. She was frightened, because she saw her husband going headlong to

ruin and, listening to the talk of the Turkis on the *bazar*, she knew that terrible times were coming when Turkis and Chinese would be killing each other. What then would her position be – a Turki woman with a Chinese husband?

Three Western women were living in the same town, and one day Patima said to herself: "Those three women are foreigners and I am a foreigner too, so I will go and see them." On that plea she first crossed a Christian threshold. They were immediately friends, for she was a very lovable woman, spontaneous and expansive in every expression of her affection.

The Trio were needing a Turki teacher and asked her to come and help them, so it came to pass that she spent some time each day with her friends, and every day the lesson centred round some picture which told a story with unexpected meanings. She was deeply interested, because the stories that held such wisdom were merely incidents of everyday life, as that of the father whose son ran away from home and who loved him back, and the other about a man who took a Gobi journey and met bandits who nearly killed him and he must have died of wounds, but that some good man came along and took charge of him. Her favourite was that about the shepherd, who had a flock of a hundred

sheep and who lost a little one from it. When she said to the missionary : " If it was a weak one it would not matter losing it," the missionary said : " That Shepherd would die to save the poorest of His sheep." She never forgot that.

Then her friends left the town on a long journey, and she was lonely again. Just about this time she had a letter from her home, which came in answer to a message someone had taken for her, and it brought her permission to return to her own people again. It was a three months' journey to get there, but irresistible nostalgia had her in its grip, and when a man offered to take her back to her own people if she would travel with him as temporary wife, she agreed. So with little Ginesta, she set out once more across the great desert.

She travelled for two weeks, and each day hope and fear alternated in her mind. Would this man betray her as every man had always betrayed her, and strand her in some impossible position ? Or would he take little Ginesta and sell her in one of the towns where girls were so expensive ? Or would she get safe home, to that paradise of her childhood, once more ?

One evening at a lonely Gobi stage she crouched at the tent door, blowing up the camp-fire to make a meal. When she lifted her eyes she could scarcely

believe that she was seeing aright. Those three foreign women, her dear friends, were coming down the road in their carts. With one bound she was by their side and the next moment they were clasped in each other's arms, she pouring out the story of this new venture, while the tall, stern Turki stood by, watching the strange scene.

"A letter came from my people," she explained excitedly. "They say I may go home, and they will receive me back and take little Ginesta in also."

The Trio listened to it all with aching hearts. Her blind desire to see her parents once more, made her completely overlook the fact that, even if the man kept his word, she would only enter the door of that proud house as a despised and rejected woman, to do menial service with the lowest of the slaves.

But Patima knew that which no one else in that rich house had heard. She knew she had a Father in heaven and that there was One named Jesus - Ai-sa they called Him - Who loved her so much that He died for her. She had no words to say what she felt about it, but it was so wonderful, almost too wonderful to be, that God's own Son should come from heaven and die to save - Patima.

Dear Patima! There are many like you in Central Asia, broken by men and mended by God.



PART EIGHT  
AMONG THE EUROPEANS

“ The little road says go,  
The little house says stay,  
And O, it's bonny here at home  
But I must go away.

And go I must, my dears,  
And journey while I may,  
Though heart be sore for the little house  
That had no word but stay.”

## AMONG THE EUROPEANS

THE spirit of revolt and rebellion stirred by "The Thunderbolt," spread like a forest fire through Turkestan. Here and there was an ambitious man to whom any revolt, rebellion, war or insurrection appealed as a possible occasion for self-aggrandisement. The populace might suffer, but so long as he was promoted and rose to greater power, he cared not a whit.

The provincial Governor was too feeble for strong action, but under the domination of panic, capable of wild actions. With unreasoning caprice he exalted one man and put down another, and the one who was his adviser to-day fell under suspicion to-morrow. Shootings and executions kept the capital in a ferment. He betrayed the Turkis by making a prisoner of their racial ruler, the young Khan, and turned the best of his Mongolian troops against himself by treacherously inducing their leader to enter his Yamen, and then killing him. The nearer trouble came, the more wildly he behaved, until his terrors were such that he lived behind locked doors surrounded by a triple guard of armed men.

For the people there was not even the safety valve of free speech, newspapers were forbidden, and an army of censors controlled every channel through which information might circulate. Spies were everywhere, and gained promotion according to the frequency of their reports. The infuriated Turkis saw, in union with "The Thunderbolt's" army, a possible means of overthrowing the Government, and their storm centre was Hami. Kashgar produced its own war lord who started the blaze in the west of the province, and midway between the two the Karashar Mongols laid their plans. The turbulent Tungan is always ready for revolt, so the whole province became daily more excited.

The Trio were perfectly conscious that they were being steadily pressed onwards toward the Russian border and Europe, with the forest fire of revolt coming up behind them. They therefore made the necessary applications for passports, and guidance was confirmed when the best-informed of their friends came to bring news that "The Thunderbolt" was marching on the town where they were staying, and if they did not wish to see him they had better not delay. So they moved on from stage to stage across the great Dzungarian plain, until they reached the City of Seagulls, the last town of Turkestan.

Many things happened by the way. Among them was the reunion with a certain young girl who had come to Christ in the City of Prodigals. Her father was Judge of the North-West area. He got into trouble when a band of men were brave enough to resist the attack of a gang of Moslem robbers, and brought one of the thieves to justice. The Judge condemned him, but a few days later the Moslem party demanded his release, and the Judge confronted the test which comes sooner or later to every mandarin of the North-West, who must finally bow to Islam, or lose his post.

The Judge had two daughters, girls of sixteen and eighteen, who were very friendly with the missionaries. One day something happened. At a certain meeting one of the Trio was speaking about a man who sowed good seed in his land, which never came to fruition because the soil on which it fell was hard and stony. She then told of the Saviour who, though the Lord and Giver of Life, could be rejected by lack of response in human hearts. That day Pearl went home and made her decision, then she brought her young sister to Christ. A few months later they both asked for baptism and the father, being an exceptionally intelligent and broad-minded man, consented, saying: "My daughters' religion is their personal matter; they

may do as they will." The baptismal service was held one Friday, and the two girls were to take their first Communion on the Sunday, but on Saturday night word reached the Judge that his life was in danger, and before dawn the whole family fled to an unknown destination.

The Trio never knew, until they reached Turkestan, where their friends had found shelter. The family had been through seas of trouble and the girls had learnt more about prayer, experimentally, than any could have taught them. At the frontier their father had come within an ace of being shot and in Hami they had been caught in the siege, and nearly starved, but now the father once more had a good post and his daughters were earning their living as teachers, and making a good confession of their faith.

The missionary has to endure so much disappointment, and so often to see those who make a good beginning fail to endure, that when he sees fruit from a handful of seed scattered broadcast, as was a case in the City of Sands, or finds character develop and growth proceed without human nurture, as was evident with Pearl and her sister, it sends him on his way rejoicing.

The last three weeks of the long journey, which

began in April at the City of Sands and ended in September at the City of Seagulls, was taken in a Russian peasant cart driven by Piotr, formerly private in the Cossack battalion which guarded the last of the Czars. His three horses trotted abreast, the bells jingling merrily and Piotr incessantly flourishing a short-handled whip, urging them on to greater speed.

It was part of his responsibility to see that each evening there was shelter for the night, and at midday he would halt by a stream where the kettle was filled, and slung from the shaft of the *brishka* over a smouldering fire of dried cow-dung, which everyone helped to collect. When the kettle boiled all shared the tea and soaked their dry bread in the fragrant steaming infusion.

The road over which they were travelling was the main route which connects Chinese Turkestan with Southern Siberia. During the first part of the journey they passed through large and important towns, including Manas, the great grain market of Turkestan. Everywhere was the joy of harvest, and the threshing-floors were a sight to make glad the heart of man. It was a land of plenty and there was abundance of grain, with apples, pears, grapes and every kind of vegetable.

As yet there were neither brigands, beggars nor

starving people, but six months later there was slaughter and famine in Turkestan also.

The *bazars* were alive with business, Mongolian men and women bartered pelts for grain, Qazaqs and Khirghiz encumbered the road, riding through the *bazar* to the shop doors where, refusing to alight, they bargained from their seat of vantage for some Russian commodity. Samovars, china bowls and brass basins were the favourite purchases, but even sewing-machines were skilfully balanced across the saddle, and carried off to distant tents by the steppe-dwellers.

Later on the Trio came to mountainous country where, in place of towns, were the encampments of the nomads. By religion Moslem, by politics partisan of the U.S.S.R., intelligent, virile, adaptable and ready for education, the Qazaq is on one point inflexible – nomad he was born and nomad he will remain. At mere sight of the model dwellings which the Soviet Ministry of Housing has prepared for him, he stealthily rolls up his tent and slips across the border to the Turkestan pastures. The substantial felt tents hold all he needs for comfort. Heavy rugs cover the ground, and splendid metal-faced boxes hold good clothes, while the cooking and eating utensils are of shining copper and gay china.





Aggressive Evangelism.  
A Qazaq woman meets Mildred Cable.



Sometimes, when the Trio lifted the curtain, they would see a group of women sitting on the floor round a sewing-machine, on which the mother was running up carelessly made garments for the family. The brilliantly coloured gowns were decorated with buttons, and over the robe a short, velvet coat was worn.

These Qazaq women offered a picturesque sight, standing round the tent door, gaily dressed and faces swathed in a white wimple. Though Moslems, they were not closely veiled, and strode rapidly about the pastures, with a swing of capacity.

They were interested in the missionaries but having, as a people, accepted Mohammedanism, they now view the messenger of Christ with suspicion.

When the Trio halted at one camping-ground, a splendid young woman, wearing an olive-green dress over riding-breeches, and a pink kerchief on her head, strode out of a tent to greet them. She was delighted to talk with Western women and revealed an unexpected amount of general information regarding world events. Her brother, a student in Moscow, had taught her many things, including some Latin. There were various points of interest in the neighbourhood and she took the

Trio round to view them, eager to impart and eager to learn.

If – if – one of the many tragic “ifs” which cause the missionary to groan in spirit – if the Church of Christ had only been about its business, even fifty years ago, when one pioneer missionary had already pointed out this very area as suitable for immediate evangelisation – if then the wrangling sects had ceased from noisy controversy about ecclesiastical minutiae and hair-splitting differences of interpretation, there might have been silence enough in which to hear the command of God sending some to these very people. The way then was simple, and free from international complications. A tribe so responsive to new ideas, so ready to assimilate liberating thought, so filled with the spirit of adventure, might have become a Church on fire for Christ in the East, instead of a potent agency for Bolshevism. It has been left too long. Suspicious governments now guard, Islam controls and Communism has captured them.

In the City of Seagulls everyone knew Piotr, and it was incumbent on him to drive his guests in style. Right through the crowded main street the sturdy horses galloped abreast, shaking their thick manes and scattering the crowd of Kalmuks, Turkis,

long-robed Chinese and white-turbaned Mullahs, to the gate of the house where the Trio were to be lodged. The street was Turkestan and its crowd was the multi-coloured Central Asian throng, but the group of cottages where they stayed was pure Siberian. The thick mud walls, the small windows, the scrubbed boards, the white-washed stove, with its sleeping-place on top, were identical with those of the *isba*, which its owner had abandoned in Semipalatinsk.

It was Saturday afternoon and each Siberian housewife was at the tub, washing cotton dresses for the next day's church-going, while the boiler was filled up for the children's Saturday night bath. To-morrow the workshop of every homely trade would be closed and the family party, dressed in its poor best, would keep the Sunday festival.

The sudden transition from gross idolatry to Christian tradition was the first breath of home air to the Trio. Idolatry is an almost meaningless word to the Westerner, who has never had to hold his own against the spirit of suffocation which Satan spreads among those who worship him. In the West an idol is a toy, an ornament, a mascot, a fashion, but in the land where it commands the homage of men and women, its hand-wrought

figure is a mask for the Devil, who, through it, receives obeisance and worship. Therefore, the missionary never dares to relax the intensity of his inmost protest.

For the first time for many years the Trio woke up to an all-pervading sense of "Sunday atmosphere." Its outward manifestations were closed shops, clean clothes, leisured attitudes, and something extra for breakfast. At the hour of public worship, when the road was full of little family parties, the Trio also, in their poor best, joined up and walked slowly to the hall which was used as Church by the Orthodox.

Inside the building men and women were separated, and the right aisle was crowded with men, young and old, each of whom was absorbed in his own devotions. There was a sound of murmured prayers, and rough hands were lifted to form the sign of the Cross, while at intervals one or another fell on his knees, and laid his forehead to the bare boards. The other aisle was crowded with women whose faces expressed both passion and resignation. Each wore as head-dress the kerchief, characteristic of her own locality. The big-boned, horny-handed peasants, whose bodies were bowed by field work, had come here to give expression to something which, were it not

allowed an occasional hour of relief, might snap under the strain of its intensity.

In the choir-stalls stood ten young men and women who sang, with natural genius, the ancient music of the Russian liturgy. A peasant priest officiated, whose long hair curled over his shoulders and whose beard was the colour of a ripe horse-chestnut. His vestments were of poor material, and he wore a stiff, pink robe which made him look like a life-sized doll. He was followed by a clumsy little acolyte carrying a wooden candle-stick as tall as himself. The *ikons* of the sanctuary were the poorest oleographs, and it might have been thought a tawdry spectacle were it not for the impressiveness of the sorrow-scarred human beings who formed the congregation.

The atmosphere was surcharged with pathos, sorrow, resignation and pain. Even though they were here to worship Him Who is resurrection and life, there was no joy, no expression of hope, no lifting up of the head, only long-drawn sighs and falling tears. It was a company of exiles, and in their midst were a few who, that very morning, had reached the City of Seagulls after a perilous flight from Siberia, bringing for most some word concerning relatives left behind, news which caused the barometer of life to rise or fall under pressure

of joy or grief. To the priest himself the word had come: "Your son has met with a sudden death." Small wonder that, as he performed the ritual that day, he moved in and out of the sanctuary as one who walks in a dream.

. . . . .

One hour later a little maiden with forget-me-not eyes and a wild rose complexion called at the *isba* to fetch the Trio to a meeting of the non-Orthodox Russian Christians. She led them to a shabby house in another part of the town, where they were introduced to the living-room of a very poor watchmaker. The room was filled with a congregation of men and women, among whom small children ran freely in and out without seeming to cause any disturbance to the gathering, which was characterised by a spirit of great intimacy. Behind a long table sat the watchmaker himself, and with him two young men who were also recognised as leaders.

In the centre of the table was a book, and that book was the Bible. The service proceeded without any form of ritual. The first half-hour was spent in singing evangelical hymns, which so exactly expressed the feelings of the worshippers as to constitute their spontaneous pæan of praise. The joyousness of that singing was such that its



triumphant shout dispelled all gloom of the past, or fear of the future.

After the singing there was prayer, and this also took on its own individual form for, at a sign, all knelt and there was a fervent murmur as each one began to pray audibly, until the room was filled with the sound of petition which first rose then gradually died down and lapsed into silence. From this the company passed to a new outburst of jubilant singing, and then came the central act of the service, which was a reading from the Bible. Only two or three members of the congregation owned a copy of the Scriptures, so this reading had a particular importance for them, and they all listened with intense earnestness as to the oracles of God.

The preaching was not understood by the Trio, as it was entirely in Russian, but it evidently consisted of a few simple remarks by one and another, concerning the passage which had been read. Seeing they could not understand, they had leisure to look around and notice the peculiar characteristics of these people as they contrasted with those of the Orthodox congregation. All equally poor, equally outcast, equally in danger, the dominating expression of the one group was tragedy and of the other radiant joy.

It had seemed an anachronism for a man dressed in pink brocade and tawdry tinsel, his long hair hanging loose about his shoulders, to be swinging a censer and performing recondite rituals before a congregation whose very faces declared their need of a living Saviour approachable by common men. What ailed him that he failed to detect their inarticulate cry: "Sir, we would see Jesus"? That day the hearts of both priest and people were wrung with sorrow, but they only stood together among the shadows and gazed upon the mysteries of religion.

In the watchmaker's shabby room while ritual was absent, tradition was discarded and even the simplest ceremonial forms were lacking, the service was joyous and living, and as the radiant people sang, prayed and read that Book, their sorrow was turned into joy. The contrast was that between stately death and rugged life.

The snag of the "Schismatics" was theological hair-splitting and intolerance of anyone else's bit of the hair. Later on, when a matter of baptism was under discussion, an expression of grieved aloofness settled on the faces of a certain man and his wife, which grew to pained disapproval when they found the leaders not prepared to waive a detail of method, in deference to their superior

theological acumen. Such rigidity seems to be an indigenous growth of the Protestant soul, but with the entrance of the missionaries something happened which arrested attention and helped to fix it on the central purpose of the Christian calling.

A Chinese, once an idolater, but now a Christian believer, came forward with a request to be baptised also. It was an unprecedented event in the experience of this congregation, that a converted heathen should ask for the privileges of fellowship, and the incident opened a vista of possible service before them. Their enemies had scattered them from Siberia and God had brought them to a Christless land. To what purpose this exile? When it was the turn of the missionary to speak, there was some straight talk about the spread of the Gospel through the dispersal of persecuted Churches: "Open that book which lies before you and read in the Acts of the Apostles. The very things which happened in Samaria, may come to pass in Turkestan, and the eunuch of Gaza's desert find a counterpart in the Qazaq of Dzungaria's steppes."

. . . . .

The tarantass specially licensed by the U.S.S.R. authorities to ply between the City of Seagulls and Baxti, stood at the door of the little *isba* where the

Trio and Topsy were staying. The carriage was like a large tea-tray laid on four wheels, and they all sat round its edge, dangling their legs. In the middle was the luggage which consisted of four rugs, four pillows, two large bags of sun-dried crusts and one pot of jam, given them by the members of the Christian community, who were greatly concerned lest they starve under the famine conditions of Southern Siberia. There was also a large bag of *zamba*, which is Tibetan food made from parched corn, ground to flour, and which only needs the addition of hot water to produce a nourishing, sustaining, palatable gruel, and a few of the bricks of tea which central China manufactures from the leavings of the tea-shops, for consumption in Turkestan.

Of money they had not one cent, it being forbidden to take any coin into Russia, and the government which forbids faith in God, demands from its visitors such faith in itself, that they must pass its frontier penniless, staking everything on a draft which the Soviet Bank promises to honour.

The party rolled along in company with the faithful Chinese servants who had shared the dangers of the road all the way from the City of Sands. Soon the Chinese frontier station was sighted, a soldier called on them to halt, luggage was examined,

passports stamped, one last witness for Christ made to the frontier guard, then the party stood and sang once more its valedictory hymn :

*" Let the fiery, cloudy pillar  
Guide me all my journey through."*

It was a hard parting, and there were tears in all eyes as the cart went on with no escort but the Russian driver, and China lay behind once more.

For half an hour the road lay across a level plain and soon the tall, red tower of the Soviet outpost was seen. Sentries were on guard and, from a point of vantage, a soldier scanned the horizon with a telescope. Again passports were examined and the party drove one mile more to the village of Baxti. At the Custom House, baggage was most rigidly inspected and their persons searched for contraband goods. When the officers released them they went to the Bank, where the cashier exchanged their draft for money, then on to the garage. Here the motor-cars which connect Baxti with the railhead, ran in and out, depositing passengers and starting off once more on the seventeen hour trip.

There was a small group of people waiting, for the postal van was due to leave in an hour. The most interesting of these were an Uzbek man and

woman who had travelled from Tashkend to the Turkestan border where they had been refused admittance, so were turning back to cover the same weary ground over again. The man was ninety years of age, shrewd in mind and wiry in body. Sitting in a corner of the room was his wife, a little shapeless figure, whose whole front was enveloped in a black buckram veil. Not one line of the living being inside was visible, for over her head was draped a black cloth coat with empty sleeves hanging loose on the shoulders. She could have been mistaken for a bale of goods, were it not that a thin voice piped up from behind the buckram to ask the Western women where they came from, where they were going, where their husbands were, and how many children they had. As soon as the room was empty of men the veil was slipped to one side and the small, pale face of a woman of seventy looked out, her eyes blinking at the light. She said she was the mother of twenty children, but the Trio, well used to the customs of Moslem houses, quite understood that she was claiming as her own the progeny of several women.

With a roar the great motor-truck rushed into the court and the travellers hustled for a place. It was the heaviest type of lorry, so high that the passengers only scrambled in with the greatest

difficulty, and it was seatless, so that men and women sat on the floor, using their luggage to protect them from bumps.

Sometimes, lurching along in their old Chinese cart, the Trio had pictured the delights of a car to speed them on their weary way, but now they learnt the horrors of heavy motor vehicles on rough roads. It was two o'clock in the afternoon when they left, and every few hours throughout the night they stood for a moment to pick up mail bags, which were unceremoniously hurled into the truck regardless of the passengers.

At midnight a slightly longer halt was made. It was pitch-dark, but a few buildings could be distinguished in the gloom. There was a sudden shout and half a dozen young men leapt on to the lorry, while companions handed up heavy boxes, bales and steel girders. All these things were flung on the top of the passengers, regardless of safety to life or limb. Some of the men were drunk and all were wild hooligans. One big bale landed on the top of the little Uzbek woman, who began to wail, lament and scold her husband. Male passengers protested vigorously and some tried to throw the goods overboard. The Trio saw that any protest was useless and were soon so pinned down by cases, steel girders and mail bags as to be

unable to move. The climax was reached when a long, sharp, naked saw was laid across Mildred's body so that as soon as the motor moved she must be flung on to its teeth. Passengers sat in terror, the little Uzbek shrieked and called on Allah to witness the iniquity, and the driver stood by helpless.

The Trio knew perfectly well that when the car moved there must be broken limbs or lacerated flesh, if not loss of life, and each one silently called on God to deliver in the hour of peril. Man may shut up churches, forbid services, and ridicule religion, but the earth is still the Lord's, the heavens also are His, and He is nigh unto them that call upon Him. In that hour of danger their cry was heard, and suddenly something happened.

The helpless driver mounted his seat and started his engine, but the truck refused to move. Again and again he tried and still the car remained stationary. At last he gave up and, turning round, said: "Comrades, my engine will not carry this load." The answer was a shout and a volley of violent words, but the driver persisted: "Comrades, my engine will not work." At last, to the amazement of everyone, the hooligans leapt from the lorry, flung out their goods, girders, trunks and saws, and vanished into the darkness.



All night the lorry rushed on, passing over undulating country, up hill and down dale, through small villages where the only inhabitants who roused were those who belonged to the little post offices. They lighted up at the approach of the truck and got their mail bags ready to fling on without delay.

By half-past ten next morning the railway station of Sergiopol was sighted, and as the motor drew up torrents of rain came down. The station water tank was boiling, and the famished party had a drink of tea and a bowl of *zamba* before boarding the train which was to take them to Novo-Sibirsk, where they would join the Trans-Siberian line. Thirty-six hours later they reached this junction.

. . . . .

The railway station of Novo-Sibirsk, at two in the morning, was a mass of sleeping humanity. The waiting-room was very large, but still too small for the parties who squatted in and around it, waiting patiently for an opportunity to travel on to their destination. The Trio hoped to leave again at six o'clock, but were informed that no tickets were available for that train and they must wait until three o'clock in the afternoon.

A very wearying day dragged slowly by, most of which was spent standing in a queue at the

booking-office. Even so it was better for them than for others, for they were possessors of a precious slip of paper, signed by the Station Master, which instructed the booking-clerk to supply the bearer with four tickets to Moscow. The three o'clock train never materialised, but about half-past six one drew up to the platform. It was longer and more crowded than any train the Trio had ever seen and its whole length was composed of third-class carriages. It already held far more people than seats, and after a frantic struggle the Trio were left stranded on the platform with a large crowd of unsuccessful gate-crashers like themselves. The situation was desperate because this was, quite evidently, the chronic condition of the railway system.

Then something happened. There was a woman who, seeing that they were strangers and did not speak Russian, had shown them various small kindnesses during the day. This person now came forward and stated the difficulty of the strangers' position to the Conductor. She evidently had a ready and persuasive tongue, and after a long argument room was made on the train for the Trio and for herself.

Having helped them so far, she undertook to see them safely to Moscow. It was impossible

to supply the members of the party with a bench each, so the four passengers were given two seats to share, and at night they took it in turns to lie on the floor among the cockroaches, as so many of their fellow-travellers were doing.

In the course of the long days of slow travel the Trio came to know their protectress very well indeed. They carried a Russian phrase-book and with its help fairly free communication was established between them. She was a school-mistress, and there was an evident mental brilliance about her which gave her a leader's place in the crowd. There was no doubt about her being a red-hot Communist and when the name of God was mentioned, she shook her mass of short, fair hair and said: "Is there anyone left who still believes in God?" She looked pityingly, yet with a touch of wistfulness when she saw the three women read the New Testament and pray, as if to say "You ought to know better, and yet . . ."

The journey was supremely uncomfortable, but deeply interesting, and the kindness of fellow-travellers made it a very touching experience. With such crowds on the train, the supply of boiling water in the railway station tanks was wholly inadequate, and as there was no water whatsoever on the train, each time it stopped there was a wild rush

with the kettles. The Trio would have stood small chance in the crowd, but each time some young man came forward and filled their kettle for them.

Once there was an incident which threatened difficulty. At a side station an Inspector questioned a detail concerning the Trio's tickets. It seemed that there was a loop line and that they should, according to some indication written on the ticket, have travelled by the other side of the loop. The mistake had been made in utter ignorance, and all they could do was to show the sentence in their phrase-book which said: "I will pay the difference." The matter was, however, not to be so easily settled and the irate Inspector seized their baggage with a view to throwing it out on the station platform. At this point their fellow-travellers rose up in protest. One strong-faced woman declared that the man was a "formalist." Another took up the word and another, until the whole company was expressing its hatred of a "formalist." The Inspector retired, discomfited, and in the end a sheet of paper and a pencil was borrowed from the Trio, with which the school-mistress wrote out a report of the proceedings, to which each person in the carriage signed his name. After this had been handed in they were left undis-

turbed, and the administration made amends for its Inspector's formalism by refusing to accept the difference which they owed on the tickets.

The great Moscow terminus was swarming with people and enquiry brought the unpleasant news that every hotel was full; but the Trio were allowed to sleep in the women travellers' dormitory, where there were couches to lie on and a woman attendant. The "model" railway station was extraordinarily interesting. It contained not only dormitories, but a crèche, infant welfare, dispensary and school-rooms where parents left their children to be taken care of, while they saw to their own business. Everyone wore the poorest clothes and the most wretched boots. Meals could be bought at the railway station buffet, but food was of a very inferior quality and at the rate of exchange quoted by the Baxti bank, fabulously expensive.

It took two days of hard work to secure all the necessary *visas* for which it had been impossible to arrange in Central Asia, where are neither Lithuanian, Latvian, Polish, German nor Belgian consuls. Since last the Trio were in Europe they had read of so many conferences being held, and so much time and money being spent, with the object of promoting *entente* between the nations, that they hoped for better things this time, but the

old suspicions were still there which make of each frontier a barrier bristling with annoying regulations to antagonise the traveller as he approaches the country. If the desire for goodwill were sincere, the first item on the conference agenda should be: "Passports; how to dispense with them."

The troublesome business was only accomplished with the help of a motor-car, hired from Intourist, which took the party to and fro until all the various technical requirements of the different consulates had been complied with. Apart from the nightmare experiences of the Baxti lorry, this was the Trio's first motor drive since last furlough, and they were out to thoroughly enjoy it. It was too bad that on that first occasion Francesca should have been pitched out of the car on to the Moscow cobblestones. Happily, there was no worse harm than bruises, which she tried to ignore, lest she be compelled to have the injuries treated at the hospital, to which the chauffeur was determined to take her, and certainly would have done, had she not sternly suppressed his zeal.

. . . . .

All the roubles remaining from the Baxti banker's bounty, were to be confiscated at the opposite frontier, but, with good management, the Trio succeeded in narrowing the balance down to such

a fine point that there were only three left for the Government to take.

The stately Custom House Hall at Negoreloye, was decorated with wall-paintings, illustrating the bliss of life under Soviet regime, and a frieze composed of a stencilled slogan: "Workers of the world unite." Examination of baggage was rigid and their quilts and pillows were fingered so carefully, that nothing undetected could have remained in either. The Trio laid the meagre remnants of their money on the table, remarking that they would have liked something to eat, but if their last roubles were confiscated, of course they would have to do without food.

"If you spend it in the buffet, I will let you have it," said the Customs *tavarish*, but the examination was dragged out to such length that there was no time for a meal. Determined to get full value out of their money, one of the Trio flew to the buffet and looked wildly round for something both edible and portable. There was nothing left but a dish of apples and a great many cigarettes, so she swept up as many of the apples as she could carry, and rushed back in triumph to the train.

It was not yet the end of the Russian line, and before long the train stopped again to allow every official and soldier of the U.S.S.R. to alight. Then,

carrying passengers only, the engine-driver proceeded to Stolpce, the Polish frontier town. From a land of plenty in Chinese Turkestan, the travellers had stepped over an invisible line into the famine conditions of South Siberia. Now, on the Polish border, they passed over another invisible line, to a land where again food was abundant and could be bought without restriction.

The station of Stolpce was crowded with school children, all keenly interested in the arrival of the Moscow Express. This day they had an unexpected treat in the appearance of Topsy, a little Chinese girl in her native dress. They all stared, then turned in a body, and followed her into the waiting-room. Among them were teachers who spoke French and German and soon an improvised missionary meeting was in full swing, which only ended when the bell sounded to summon all passengers on board for Berlin.

Some hours later the Transcontinental Express, bearing the Trio and Topsy swiftly homeward, rolled majestically into the great Friedrichstrasse station at Berlin. Here was no difficulty with hotels, and there was one close at hand which was clean, cheap, comfortable and well managed. A bed at last! They had not lain in a real one for years. The luxury of that bath, with unlimited



hot water, soap and towels, after two weeks of dry rubs—there is no word in the English language adequate to describe.

The Trio had found a letter of credit awaiting them in Moscow, but, owing to the peculiar regulations which affect travellers' finances under Soviet regime, they decided not to draw on it until they left the U.S.S.R. In Berlin there were no subtle traps for unwary feet, and they were soon furnished with all the money they required, so they celebrated the event with a good meal in a restaurant. There was a bewildering choice of dishes, all of which appeared to be made from clean and decent materials, and each person was supplied with a shining tumbler of untainted water which could be drunk without fear.

It was a two class restaurant. Some of the tables were laid with a *convert*, while others only boasted a marble top. The Trio thought it best to accommodate themselves slowly to the luxuries of Western life, so sat down in the lower place, but gave themselves up whole-heartedly to the pleasures of the table—Chicken salad and mayonnaise. Fruit tart. Coffee.

Their down-and-out clothes made them inconspicuous in shabby Russia, but very much otherwise in trig Berlin. They did not own a garment other

than those they wore, and at first they hesitated to make themselves known to self-respecting friends. But memory stirred and broke down their fears, so, on the second day, when they were at least clean and tidy, a letter was written which brought kind-hearted, loving people to that little hotel, to carry them off to a beautiful estate in the pine forests.

Under the trees of the avenue was gathered a great assembly of German girls who, as the motor turned in at the gate, burst into a loud, joyous, sonorous hymn of triumph. They sang as those might sing who were there to greet some victorious army on its return from battle, but all that stepped out of the car was three weary, shabby women, who stood silent and so deeply moved that they only wanted the song to last long enough to give them time to recover.

Those three women had thought of themselves as strangers in Berlin, but found that day a whole company of friends who, for years, had shared with them, through the fellowship of prayer, the hardness of their toil.

. . . . .

The last lap of the long journey, Berlin to Victoria – and during its hours time to think of what awaited them over the threshold of London life. Among the peoples of the East they had lived

and dressed as the Chinese and were used to slow, decorous methods of life. The journey through Russia had not disturbed their equilibrium, for they travelled with simple, unsophisticated people, but now they were nearly home, and England lay just ahead with its safety, its security, its high standard of comfort and efficiency, but with its rush and speed.

During the long years of their exile they were conscious of having lost most of the things that the world prizes, together with the easy sense that no situation could arise which might take them at a disadvantage. One thing they had gained and that they esteemed so highly, that everything else might go, provided they retain it. Moving slowly through desert solitudes they had learnt to measure life, not by the fretful ticking of the clock, but by the majestic course of the stars, and among those silences the relative value of things temporal and eternal had been settled for ever. In the wild rush of accelerated life, could the poise of spirit essential to that true discrimination be retained? . . .

The boat train dashed on - Bromley - Penge - Sydenham - Victoria.

"Here they are!"

What amazing thing had taken place at home by which thousands of people had come to care so

greatly for the extension of Christ's Kingdom in Central Asia?

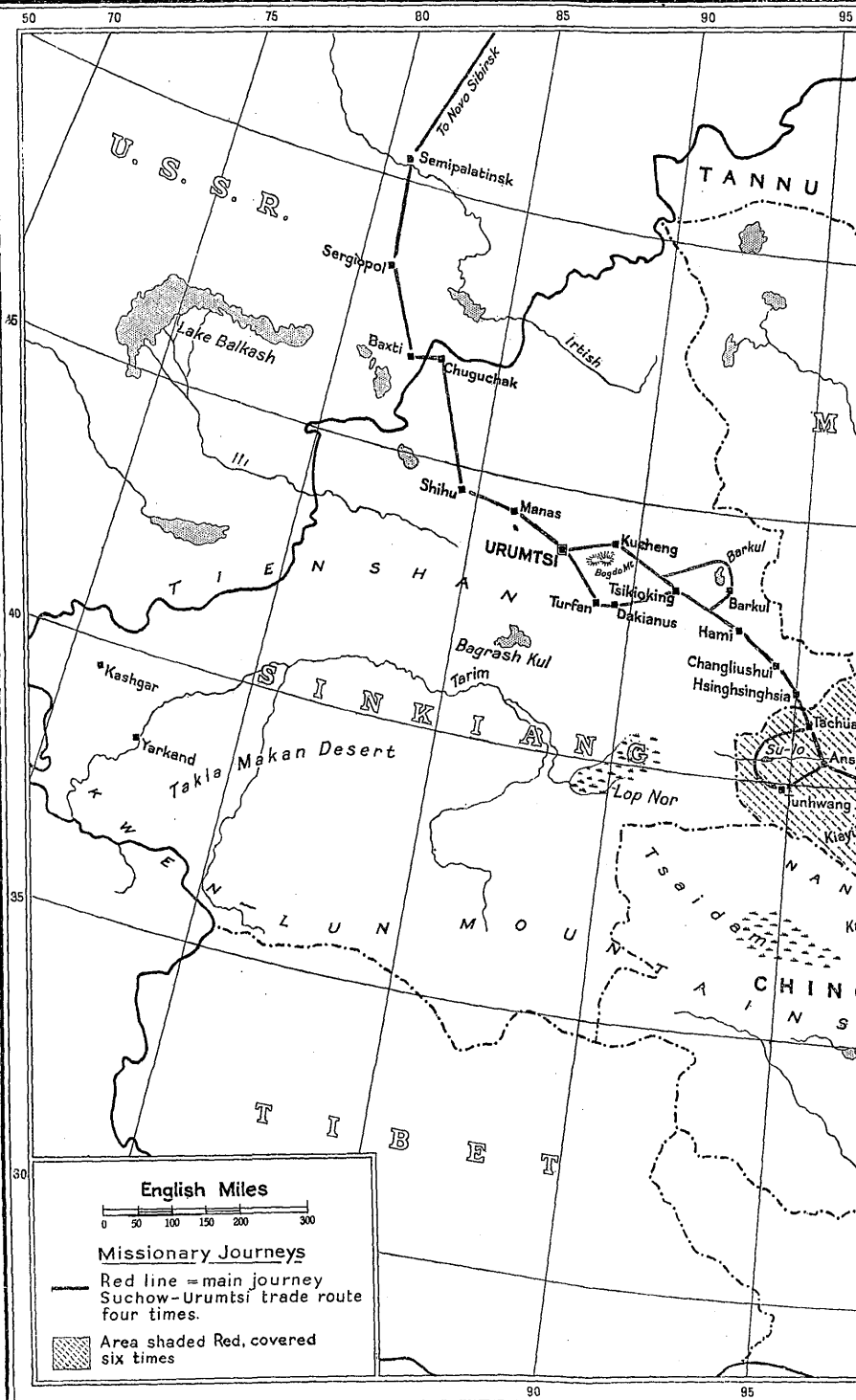
Something had happened. The Trio now began to understand how it was that doors had been flung open before them, why such great opportunities for evangelism had been given them in those critical days, and why they had always been conscious of Divine protection in the hour of danger.

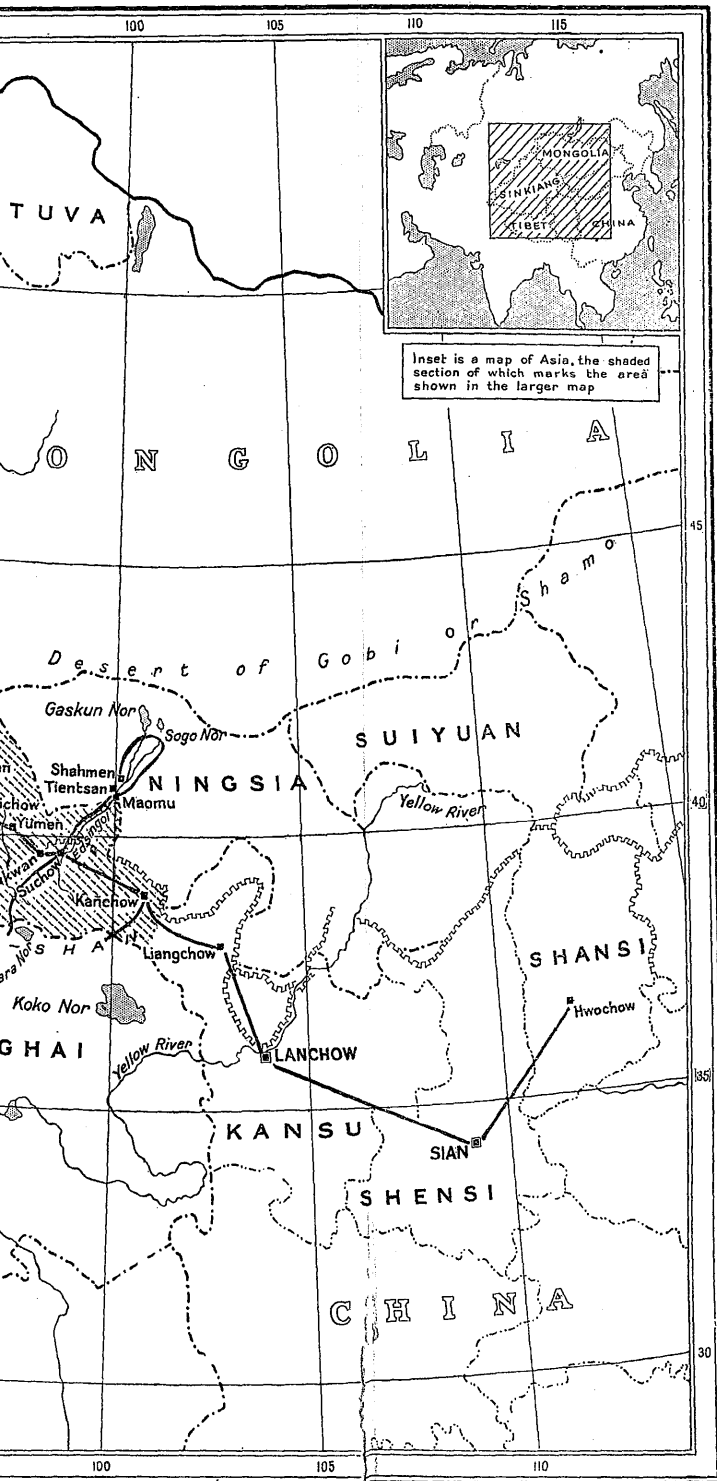
The Church at home had done her part, and the Trio had been carried along by the buoyancy of the faith which constantly upheld them.

For all companions in spiritual warfare this intimate record, *Something Happened*, has been written, and to them it is lovingly dedicated.

“ God took care to hide that country till He judged His  
people ready,  
Then He chose me for His Whisper, and I've found it,  
and it's yours ! ”







Baboon Pass = Hsinghsingshia.

City of Peace = Ansi.

City of Prodigals = Suchow.

City of Sands = Tunhwang.

City of Seagulls = Chuguchak.

Cumul = Hami.

Eyelash Oasis = Maomu.

Gates of Sand = Shahmen.

Jade Gate = Yümen.

Oasis of Flowing Water  
= Changliushui.

Oasis of Great Spring  
= Tachüan

Oasis of Heavenly Tints  
= Tientsan.

Portal of the Great Wall  
= Kiayükwan.

Mode of travel—mule cart or  
camel.

Rate of travel—3 miles per  
hour.

Travel Distances :

Suchow-Kashgar	96 days
" -Urumtsi	36 "
" -Chuguchak	62 "
" -Sogonor	18 "
" -Hwochow	50 "





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